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French's Acting Edition. No. 1177

ALIBI

A Play in Three Acts

From a story by Agatha Christie

By MICHAEL MORTON

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ALIBI

A Play in Three Acts

FROM A STORY BY AGATHA CHRISTIE

By

MICHAEL MORTON

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MAIN

ALIBI

Produced at the Prince of Wales's Theatre, London, May 15th, 1928.

CAST

Hercule Poirot	*Mr. Charles Laughton.*
Doctor Sheppard	*Mr. J. H. Roberts.*
Sir Roger Ackroyd	*Mr. Norman V. Norman.*
Geoffrey Raymond	*Mr. Henry Forbes-Robertson.*
Major Blunt	*Mr. Basil Loder.*
Inspector Davies	*Mr. John Darwin.*
Parker	*Mr. Henry Daniell.*
Ralph Paton	*Mr. Cyril Nash.*
Mr. Hammond	*Mr. J. Smith-Wright.*
Caryl Sheppard	*Miss Gillian Lind.*
Ursula Bourne	*Miss Iris Noel.*
Flora Ackroyd	*Miss Jane Welsh.*
Mrs. Ackroyd	*Lady Tree.*
Margot	*Miss Constance Anderson.*

Play produced by Gerald du Maurier.

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SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I

Scene I.—The Hall at Sir Roger Ackroyd's, Fernly Park. Afternoon.
Scene II.—The same. After dinner.
The Lights are lowered during this scene and the Curtain descends for a moment, to mark the passing of three-quarters of an hour.

ACT II

The same. Next morning.

ACT III

Scene I.—Hercule Poirot's Study. Four days later, after breakfast.
Scene II.—The same. The next night, after dinner.

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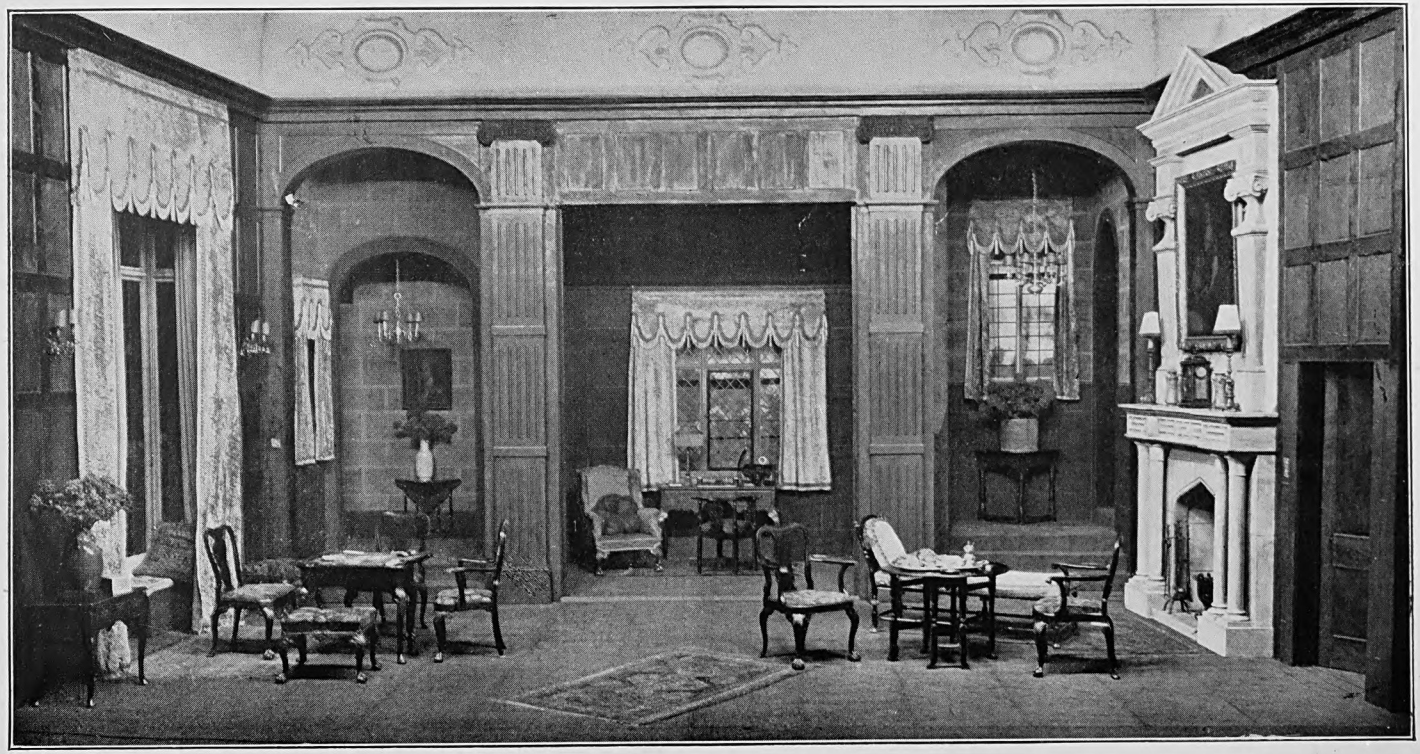

ACTS I AND II

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ALIBI

ACT I

TIME.—Afternoon.

Scene 1.—*The Hall at* SIR ROGER ACKROYD'S, *Fernly Park, is of dark oak panelling in squares. On the* R. *wall about half-way up large recessed French windows with low seats on each side of same opening on to the garden. The back wall is divided by two square pillars, between which are large double doors leading to an inner room,* SIR ROGER ACKROYD'S *study, showing a window in the* C. *of same. An arch is on either side of these pillars, the* R. *leading to the hall and house, the* L. *with stairs up and off* L. *leading to* SIR ROGER'S *bedroom. About half-way up* L. *wall a large fireplace with picture of a lady inset above it, and below fireplace down* L. *a revealed door leading to dining and billiard rooms. See picture of scene.*

(*At rise of* CURTAIN, MRS. ACKROYD *is sitting chair* C. *reading a French novel. She is holding a Moorish dagger which is used as a paper knife.* FLORA ACKROYD *and* MAJOR BLUNT *are seated at card table* R. FLORA *at the top and* BLUNT *on* R. *of same.*)

(PARKER *enters from up* R. *with newspaper and comes to above table* L.C.)

PARKER. Shall I take the tea away, ma'am?

MRS. ACKROYD. No, we haven't finished.

PARKER. The evening paper, Madame. (*Hands it to* MRS. ACKROYD *and exits up* R.)

MRS. ACKROYD (*she opens paper, scans same hastily and finds what she is looking for*). Flora, it's all here in the evening paper. (*Reads.*) "Sudden death of Mrs. Ashley Ferrars—Found dead in bed early this morning by her maid. Overdose of veronal."—What a foolish woman! What a tragedy——

FLORA. Yes indeed, especially for Uncle Roger. He seems to have aged ten years since this morning.

MRS. ACKROYD. Yes, there's no doubt he's terribly upset. It's dreadful for him,—but for us—it may mean a great change—for you, and me, and Ralph.

FLORA. How do you mean, mother?

MRS. ACKROYD. No one knows the relief it was to me when your uncle announced your engagement last night. (FLORA *gives*

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a quick look at Blunt.) You don't seem to realize the enormous difference it's going to make to our position.

Flora. My dear mother, it's the one thing I do realize. Since we had to come and live with Uncle Roger, life's been absolute purgatory—not a penny to call our own, and Uncle Roger with all his millions. Nothing I can say will induce him to continue our allowance—we're up to our eyes in debt.

Mrs. Ackroyd. Yes, debts—always debts. No one knows what I have to contend with.

Flora. It's positive martyrdom. Mother, must we go on living here?

Mrs. Ackroyd. We must.

Flora. What a curse money is——

Blunt (*gently—leaning towards her*). Does money mean so much to you?

Flora. Why, it's everything! Freedom! Life! No more scheming and scraping and lying!

Blunt (*surprised*). Lying?

Flora. You know what I mean—pretending to be thankful for all your rich relatives give you—crumbs from the table—last year's frocks and hats!

Blunt. Don't know much about ladies' clothes, but it appears to me you're always well turned out!

Flora. But it costs me something! Oh, don't let's talk of horrid things!

Mrs. Ackroyd. I thought Caryl Sheppard was coming over this afternoon.

Flora. Yes, she is.

Mrs. Ackroyd (*sitting on chair* C.). Well, she's late for tea. I do dislike people who are late for meals.

(*Enter* Ursula Bourne *and* Parker *up* R. Bourne *comes* L. *and removes tea-tray, taking it out up* R. Parker *places tray of cocktails, etc., on tea-table, then goes out up* R.)

Raymond (*enters door down* L). Where's Caryl Sheppard?—I thought she was going to play bridge. I hope she's not going to let us down! (*Comes to fireplace.*)

(Caryl Sheppard *enters up* R., *then goes across and shakes hands with* Mrs. Ackroyd.)

Caryl (*comes to* C.). No fear of that! Thought bridge wasn't the attraction! (*Goes to* Flora.) Flora held out a much more attractive bait! (*Sits on arm of chair* R.C. L. *of the card table.*)

Blunt. What was that?

Flora. That if she came, she'd meet the mysterious foreigner who's gone to live in the house opposite to her and the doctor. She's fallen heavily in love with him.

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RAYMOND (*standing above table* L.C.). *Is* he coming here? I didn't know that you knew him?

MRS. ACKROYD. We don't——

FLORA. But Uncle Roger does. Apparently he's quite a personage in London—a regular "lion"! Uncle asked him some days ago to come in to tea, and he fixed on to-day; and when uncle went out he told me that if he was not back when Monsieur Poirot—(*to* CARYL) that's the man's name—arrived, I was to show him particular attention.

CARYL. Poirot? *We* heard his name was Porrott—everybody speaks of him as Mr. Porrott in the village. (*Laughs.*)

MRS. ACKROYD (*contemptuously*). I don't see why there should be such a fuss over this foreigner—we don't know anything about him.

FLORA. But Uncle Roger thinks a lot of him—he told me that he is the great French detective—Hercule Poirot!

CARYL (*breathlessly*). Hercule Poirot?

RAYMOND. Is that who he is?

MRS. ACKROYD. Hercule Poirot! What's he doing here?

RAYMOND. Why, he's the most famous detective in the world.

FLORA. Uncle said I wasn't to talk about it, as he understood Monsieur Poirot preferred it not to be known, as he had come down here for a—for a——

BLUNT (*at table* R., *leaning back in his chair. Rather contemptuously*). Sort of rest cure, I suppose?

FLORA. That's the idea, I believe. (*Including them all with a wave of her hand.*) Now mind you, you're none of you to give me away—you're to keep it to yourselves who he is!

CARYL. Of course. (*Rises. Comes* C.) But fancy Hercule Poirot—it's simply thrilling! (*Goes over to fire.*)

BLUNT. Don't see why we should give up our bridge just because this what's-his-name doesn't keep his engagements!

MRS. ACKROYD. Flora dear, couldn't you entertain him?—I detest strangers.

(PARKER *enters and announces:*)

PARKER. Monsieur Poirot!

MRS. ACKROYD *rises.* FLORA *rises, and goes up* C. *and comes down after* POIROT *moves down to* MRS. ACKROYD.)

BLUNT (*rises*). Oh, here is the blighter.

(*Enter* HERCULE POIROT, *gives hat and gloves to* PARKER. *He bows to* FLORA. *He is most correctly dressed.*)

POIROT (*crossing to* MRS. ACKROYD C.). A thousand apologies, Madame—I am without defence; I am ashamed—I prostrate myself. (*Kisses her hand.*)

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(Mrs. Ackroyd *looks rather disgusted.*)

Mrs. Ackroyd (*introduces*). My daughter—Flora! (*Who is now on his* R.)

Poirot. Mees Flora! (*Kisses her hand.*)

Mrs. Ackroyd. Major Blunt——

Poirot (*bows*). Ah! The big game hunter! Mes felicitations!

Blunt (*to* Flora). His what did he say?

Mrs. Ackroyd. Mr. Raymond.

(Poirot *bows.*)

(Mrs. Ackroyd *sits on settee.*)

Flora. Monsieur Poirot! Let me present you to your next-door neighbour—Miss Caryl Sheppard!

(Caryl *comes behind settee to* C.)

Poirot. Mademoiselle! (*Bows over her hand brushing it lightly with his lips.*) Enchante de faire votre connaissance. (*Quickly—looking around rather embarrassed—addressing them all.*) Ah, pardon—sometimes I am what you say—"carried away"—and if I forget *everything* but my own language! (*Turning after looking at* Caryl *to* Flora.) My felicitations, Mees Flora, on your engagement to the Captain Ralph Paton.

Flora. Thank you!

Caryl. Flora, my dear, I'm most awfully glad. Congratulations.

Mrs. Ackroyd. But my dear Caryl, they've really been engaged for several weeks but for certain reasons it has been kept a secret until now. (*To* Poirot.) Won't you sit down?

(Poirot *sits chair* C.)

Her uncle is simply delighted about it—it keeps her in the family, you see!

(Raymond, *who is above table, asks* Poirot *in French if he will have a cocktail.* Poirot *refuses.*)

Caryl. Then I suppose Ralph's quarrel with his stepfather is all over now. I saw him in the village. Is he coming up here?

Flora. You saw Ralph? Impossible, my dear! Ralph hasn't been back since the row with Uncle six months ago, when he took himself off to London!

Caryl. Well, *you'd* know if he was here, if anyone did! Of course it was only in the distance—I thought I saw him—— (*Dubiously.*) I must have been mistaken. (*Crosses over and sits chair* R.C.)

(Flora *beckons to* Raymond *to come over and play bridge.* Ray-

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MOND *shakes his head, indicating that he cannot do so. Standing at head of settee.*)

MRS. ACKROYD (*to cover up what is rather an awkward situation*). Do you know, Monsieur Poirot, we began to fear you had forgotten all about us.

POIROT. Ah, Madame—I lose my head in another attraction.

MRS. ACKROYD (*banteringly*). Another attraction, Monsieur Poirot!

POIROT. It is unpardonable, but how could I come here like a worm of the earth? I was working in my garden—she is to me like a beautiful woman—irresistible! I could not tear myself away. The church clock strikes! My heart stops—I remember my engagement for the five o'clock.

MRS. ACKROYD. I'm only so sorry I missed so much of your society. (*Rises.*) You must forgive me if I leave you now, Monsieur Poirot, but I am dining very early. Good-bye, Monsieur Poirot.

(POIROT, *who has risen, bows over her hand, brushing it lightly with his lips.*)

POIROT. Madame—— (*Back to audience;* R. *of* MRS. ACKROYD, *turning up as she goes up stage.*)

MRS. ACKROYD (*crosses* R. CARYL *and* BLUNT *rise. Turning to* CARYL). Your brother is dining with us to-night. (*To* FLORA *and* BLUNT, *as she reaches* R. *arch.*) Don't forget dinner is at seven-thirty.

(*Exits up* R.)

CARYL (*sitting on chair* R.C., *facing to* R.). Monsieur Poirot——

(POIROT, C., *who is standing.*)

Tell me—did you come down here for a reason—have you a case here?

POIROT. Mees Caryl, there is only one that I am specially interested in, and it puzzles me!

CARYL. *You*? Puzzled? Never!

POIROT. Yes, I am confused. (*With a smile and a wave of his hand, finishing to himself.*) It is my own case—I do not know myself—perhaps you can help me.

CARYL (*rather embarrassed—shyly*). Y-yes.

POIROT. You permit? (*Turns chair* C., *sits facing* CARYL.) It is like this—I sit in my leetle house next to yours for weeks—looking through the window at you—and your brother; I hope he will call and see the new neighbour—but he does not come! Then I have a "brain-wave"! He is a doctor—I will call *him* in! And I call him in. "What is the trouble?" said the docteur. "I am sick for a home," I answer—"home-sick"—thinking he would ask

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me to his home. "I can't cure that," said the docteur, "if you are 'home-sick,' go home." And he left me looking through the window.

Caryl (*laughing*). How like James!

Poirot. Ah, he has not the sense of humour—your brother.

Caryl. I owe him a grudge for that.

Poirot. You blame him? I am sorry.

Caryl (*laughing*). But this is such an unromantic way to meet Hercule Poirot!

Poirot. This is not a romantic age, Mees Caryl.

Caryl. It's the usual way of meeting usual people! *You* are unusual, I should like to have met you in an unusual way. (*Quickly.*) Just to see how it feels, that's all!

Poirot (*disappointed*). Ah! ces Anglaises! I am sorry for that also, there is no romance for the girl of to-day, Mees Caryl; but there is much adventure.

Caryl. Well, I don't get any of it.

Poirot (*shaking his head*). You never know when it will come to you——

Caryl. Oh, Monsieur Poirot, it must be wonderful to associate with murderers and people who commit crimes, and go on hanging them like you do.

Poirot. Pardon me, Mees Caryl, I do not associate with criminals, and I do not hang them myself. But these are terrible things for a young lady to talk about.

Caryl. I should adore to live your sort of life, and meet criminals and hang them. After that do you think you could risk dining with the young lady to-night, if she asked you—I shall be all alone if you don't—my brother's dining here!

Poirot (*rises and bows to her, all smiles*). It is my profession to take risks, Mees Caryl. I accept with pleasure—it is kind of you to prescribe the so pleasant tonic for my home-sickness! (*Crosses to her and kisses her hand.*)

Caryl (*rises*). I must go and see about the dinner.

Flora (*rises*). Going, Caryl?

Caryl. Yes, I must.

Poirot. May I not take you in my auto, Mees Caryl—we both go the same way?

Caryl. Oh, thank you so much!

Poirot (*goes up* R. *and bows to* Blunt *and* Raymond). Bon soir, Monsieur le Major—Bon soir, Monsieur Raymond——

Caryl (*kisses* Flora, *who comes over to meet her. In an undertone.*) Monsieur Poirot is going to dine with me to-night.

(*They go up* R. *together. To* Raymond *and* Blunt.) Good-bye!

(*They murmur* "Good-bye.")

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(*They exit up* R. POIROT *who is waiting up stage, bowing, exits after them.*)

(RAYMOND *stands looking after them—his hands deep down in his trousers pockets.*)

RAYMOND. What's the time, Blunt?

BLUNT (*looks at watch*). By Jove! it's a quarter past. I've just got time for a bath.

(*Exits up* R.)

(RAYMOND *starts to go off*—FLORA *returns and comes down* R.C. *and meets him* C.)

FLORA. Geoffrey——

RAYMOND. Yes, Flora?

FLORA. Do you think there's the slightest chance . . . oh! it doesn't matter.

RAYMOND. Are you sure?

FLORA. Yes, it doesn't matter.

RAYMOND. It was an awful shock to poor old Blunt when he heard of your engagement to Ralph.

FLORA. Do you think it was?

RAYMOND. He's pretty hard up, and knows you're coming into a lot of money from your Uncle Roger.

FLORA. Don't be a cad, Geoffrey.

RAYMOND. He doesn't worship you half as much as I do.

(BOURNE *enters* L.)

(RAYMOND *goes into library up* C.)

FLORA. Oh, Bourne, you might bring some clean glasses.

BOURNE. Yes, Miss.

(FLORA *goes off up* R. *Meets* SIR ROGER ACKROYD *in the passage up* R.)

FLORA. Hullo, Uncle.

ACKROYD. Hullo, my dear.

(ACKROYD *comes down* R.C. *Turns and sees* RAYMOND, *who is in* C. *up stage.*)

Raymond.

RAYMOND. Sir? (*Comes down to* ACKROYD.)

ACKROYD. Has Monsieur Poirot been here?

RAYMOND. He's gone, sir.

ACKROYD. Damn! Why the devil didn't you keep him here? I'm expecting Doctor Sheppard. I'll be down in a minute, I'm just going up to change. (*Crosses in front of* RAYMOND.)

(RAYMOND *exits up* R.)

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(*Sees* BOURNE *at table* L.C.) What are you doing? Oh—all right.

(*Exits up stairs* L.)

(BOURNE, *facing to* L., *is arranging papers as* RALPH PATON *enters from windows* R. *He comes quickly and quietly to* R. *of table* L.)

RALPH. Ursula!

BOURNE. Oh! Ralph! (*She turns and runs to him.*)

RALPH (*in a whisper*). Shut up, Ursula! Do you want to bring the whole house in here? (*Puts hat on chair* C.)

BOURNE (*clinging to him, he kisses her*). Darling! How you frightened me! You shouldn't come here. Sir Roger's only just gone up to his room.

RALPH (*protesting*). My dear girl, I haven't lived here all my life without knowing something of the daily habits of the household! I knew every one would be upstairs dressing, and I knew you'd be pretty certain to be doing just what I found you doing! You poor darling.

(*They embrace, he kisses her again.*)

BOURNE. It's a miracle Sir Roger didn't see you.

RALPH. I took damned good care of that. Darling, you wired me to London you must see me at once! and I took the first train.

BOURNE. Why didn't you send me word you'd arrived instead of coming up like this? And I could have let you know where to meet me?

RALPH. I can't send up notes to you by anyone from the village. It would look suspicious.

BOURNE (*starts*). Look out, there's Doctor Sheppard.

RALPH (*taking his hat from chair* C., *moving up stage* C., *by* R.). But *where* can I see you?

BOURNE. In the summer-house at half-past nine. Quick! Quick!

(RALPH *goes into library up* C. *and hides behind* R. *pillar.*)

(BOURNE *picks up novel with dagger in it and puts it on mantelpiece, as* DOCTOR SHEPPARD *enters window* R. *Puts his bag on stool* R. *Crosses* L.)

DOCTOR. Good evening, Bourne.

BOURNE. Good evening, sir. (*Exits down* L.)

(PARKER *comes down from up* R.)

DOCTOR (*to* PARKER). Sir Roger back? (*Takes off overcoat.*)

PARKER (*takes* DOCTOR'S *overcoat*). He got in rather late, sir—he's changing.

DOCTOR. Oh, Parker, you might put my bag in the hall.

PARKER. Yes, sir. Nothing wrong with Sir Roger, sir?

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DOCTOR. Oh no—I've got a confinement case in the village. I may be wanted any moment.

PARKER. Confinement, sir? Nothing to do with me, I hope, sir?

DOCTOR. Not this time.

PARKER. I'm very much relieved, sir.

(*Exits up* R. *with* DOCTOR'S *overcoat and bag.*)

At PARKER'S *exit,* RALPH *re-enters from library, and comes down to* R. *of settee.*)

RALPH. Doctor——

DOCTOR. Why, Ralph! (*Puts both hands affectionately on his shoulders.*)

RALPH (C. *Puts his hat on chair* C.). Not so loud! They don't know I'm here—I sneaked in—looks like a burglary, but it isn't! (*Pours himself out a drink.*)

DOCTOR. Didn't know you were down here.

RALPH. Only came to-day. I'm stopping the night at the White Horse. Glad to see *you,* anyhow, Doctor—the one person I *am* glad to see in this damned place.

DOCTOR. What's the place been doing to you?

RALPH. Too long a story to tell you here—I'm in a devil of a mess. Haven't the faintest idea what to do next.

DOCTOR. What's the matter?

RALPH. My confounded stepfather!

DOCTOR. What's he done?

RALPH. It isn't what he's done yet, but what he's likely to do.

DOCTOR (*puts his hand on* RALPH'S *shoulder*). Is it really—serious? My dear boy . . .

RALPH. I'm fairly up against it this time. I can't see my way ahead—I'm damned if I can.

DOCTOR. If I can be of any help— You know I'd do anything for you.

RALPH. I know you would. It's good of you, Doctor, but I can't let you in on this—— Good-bye, Doctor. (*Takes his hat. As he goes out through window, turns.*) Doctor, don't say you've seen me!

(*Exits quickly through open window* R. *to garden, leaving window open.*)

(*The* DOCTOR *stands for a moment in perplexity, then appears to come to some decision, crosses to windows.*)

(SIR ROGER ACKROYD *enters in a dinner-jacket. He hurries in, in a state of nervous excitement.*)

ACKROYD. Ah! Sheppard, thank God you've come. This is a terrible business.

DOCTOR. What's wrong—is it Ralph?

ACKROYD (*looking at him in a dazed way*). Ralph? (*Wearily*

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passing a hand across his forehead.) Don't talk to me about Ralph. (*Surprised tone.*) He's in London! Do you mind shutting that window?

(Doctor *shuts window and comes* c. *Goes to fireplace.*)

(*Putting his hand to his head.*) I hardly know what I'm doing.

Doctor. What's the matter with you, Roger?

Ackroyd (*goes to door* l., *sees that it is shut properly, comes back, places chair* l. *close to table and sits*). I'm in hell! Come and sit down——

(Doctor *draws chair* c. *close to table* l. *and sits.* Parker *enters up* r.)

(*Startled.*) Who's that?

Parker. It's only me, sir.

Ackroyd. Can't I be left alone for a moment?

Parker. I was only just going to draw the curtains.

Ackroyd. Well, leave them.

(Parker *goes out up* r.)

(*To* Doctor.) Sheppard, I have a feeling I'm being watched—spied upon. (*Looks round uneasily at door* l.)

Doctor. Spied upon—what do you mean?

Ackroyd (*leaning across table to him*). Sheppard, nobody knows what I've gone through in the last twenty-four hours. If a man's house ever fell in ruins about him, mine has about me. Ralph has brought me enough trouble, but we won't talk about that now. It's the other—the other! I don't know what to do about it and I've got to make up my mind at once.

Doctor. What's the trouble?

Ackroyd (*after a slight pause*). Sheppard, you attended Ashley Ferrars in his last illness, didn't you?

Doctor (*surprised*). Yes, I did.

Ackroyd. Did it never occur to you that he didn't die a natural death——

Doctor (*after a pause*). It's funny you should mention that. At the time I had no suspicion whatever, but since—well, it was mere idle gossip that put it into my head; since then I haven't been able to get it out again; but mind you, I've no foundation whatever for that suspicion!

Ackroyd. He *was* poisoned! (*Speaks in dull heavy tones.*)

Doctor. Poisoned—what on earth do you mean? Who by?

Ackroyd. His wife!

Doctor (*startled*). That's a serious accusation to make against a dead woman who can't deny it!

Ackroyd. She told me herself.

Doctor. When?

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ACKROYD. Yesterday! My God! yesterday! It seems like ten years ago! I want your advice—I can't carry the whole weight of this thing myself!

DOCTOR. How did Mrs. Ferrars come to make this confession to you?

ACKROYD. Three months ago I asked her to marry me, she refused. I asked her again and she consented, but she refused to allow me to make the engagement public until her year of mourning was up. Yesterday I called on her and pointed out that a year and *three* weeks had now elapsed since her husband's death, and that there could be no further objection to making our engagement public property. I had noticed that she had been very strange in her manner for some days. Now, suddenly without the least warning, she broke down completely. She—she told me everything. Her hatred of her brute of a husband, her growing love for me, and the—the dreadful means she had taken. Poison! My God! It was murder in cold blood!

(ACKROYD'S *face has a horror-stricken expression on it.*)

DOCTOR. What a ghastly business!

ACKROYD (*his voice had been low and monotonous during his previous speech—and he now continues in the same tones*). Yes, she confessed everything. It seems there is one person who has known all along—has been blackmailing her for huge sums. It was the strain and fear of this person that drove her nearly mad.

DOCTOR. Who was it?

ACKROYD (*slowly*). She wouldn't tell me.

DOCTOR. Have you any suspicions?

ACKROYD. A wild idea crossed my mind, but I'm mad even to think such a thing. No, I won't even admit it to you, but I'll tell you this much, something she said made me think that this person might be amongst my own household.

DOCTOR. What?

ACKROYD. Then there was my duty in the matter. She had made me an accessory after the fact. She saw all that, I think, quicker than I did. I was stunned, you know. She begged me for twenty-four hours' grace—made me promise to do nothing till the end of that time. And she firmly refused to give me the name of the blackmailer.

DOCTOR. Why, I wonder!

ACKROYD. Because she was afraid that I should go straight to whoever it was, and then she would have to face exposure. She said she would tell me within twenty-four hours. (*Frantically.*) My God! I swear to you, Sheppard, it never entered my head what she meant to do. Suicide! And I drove her to it!

DOCTOR. No, no! Don't take an exaggerated view of things. The responsibility of her death doesn't lie at your door.

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ACKROYD. What am I to do now? How am I to get hold of the fiend who drove her to death? Whoever it was—man or woman—knew of the crime she had committed and fastened on to it like some obscene vulture. She's paid the penalty. Is this creature to go scot free? No, I'm going to fight it out. It will mean a lot of publicity, I know—that's the only thing that holds my hand.

(*The dinner gong is heard off* L.)

(*Stops, looks round.*) Look here, Sheppard, suppose we leave it like this. If no word comes from her, we'll let dead things lie.

DOCTOR (*amazed, watching* ACKROYD *very closely*). Word from her? Why, man, she's dead!

ACKROYD. I have the strongest impression that somewhere or somehow she must have left a message for me—before she went.

DOCTOR. But, Roger——

ACKROYD. I can't argue about it, but there it is.

DOCTOR (*shaking his head*). She left no letter or word of any kind—so far as I could see at her house this morning.

ACKROYD. Sheppard, I am convinced that she did. And more, I have a feeling that by deliberately choosing death, she wanted the whole thing to come out, if only to be revenged.

(*The* DOCTOR *sits back in his chair looking straight in front of himself.*)

(*There is a slight pause.*)

You don't believe in impressions?

DOCTOR. Oh yes, I do, in a sense, if as you say no word comes from her.

(PARKER *enters* R. *with a long blue envelope on a salver.*)

ACKROYD. What is it, Parker?

PARKER. A letter for you, sir. (*Comes to* L. *of* ACKROYD.)

(ACKROYD *takes it.*)

ACKROYD (*stares at it for a minute*). All right.

(PARKER *is going up stage, stops, then goes behind him to the door* L. *and exits.*)

(*Watches* PARKER *off, then in a whisper to the* DOCTOR). Look, Sheppard, her writing.

(MRS. ACKROYD *enters up* R. *Sees* ACKROYD *showing the letter to* SHEPPARD. ACKROYD *puts letter in his pocket.*)

MRS. ACKROYD (*coming down* C.). Ah! Doctor!

(DOCTOR *rises.*)

(*Turns to* ACKROYD.) Oh, Roger—so you're back! Shall we go in to dinner?

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ACKROYD (*to* SHEPPARD). Will you take Mrs. Ackroyd in?

DOCTOR (*offers* MRS. ACKROYD *his arm*). This is a terrible thing about Mrs. Ferrars——

(MRS. ACKROYD *signs to him not to say more, and they exit down* L.)

FLORA (*comes down*). Hullo, Uncle darling.

(*Exits* L.)

BLUNT. Good evening, sir. (*Comes down.*)

ACKROYD. Good evening, Blunt.

(BLUNT *exits* L.)

(ACKROYD *takes letter out of his pocket and is looking at it when* RAYMOND *comes on. He puts it back into his pocket.*)

RAYMOND (*coming down* R.C., *looks at* ACKROYD, *who is looking very worried*). Anything the matter, sir?

ACKROYD (*rises. Brusquely*). No, why do you ask? (*Turns and goes off* L.)

(RAYMOND C. *crosses* R., *watches him, looks at wrist-watch to see the time and starts to go off* L.)

Curtain.

Sceen 2.—*Same as Scene 1.*

TIME.—*After dinner.*

(*The double doors* C. *are now closed. The stool below card table* R. *is now* C. *at table* L.C. *and chair* L.C. *is in the place of stool down* R.)

(*At rise of* CURTAIN, FLORA *is discovered sitting in chair* L., *which has been moved nearer to fireplace, reading.* MRS. ACKROYD *is on terrace* R. FLORA *looks up—seeing that her mother has gone out, she rises, throws her book down angrily on table* L.—*goes to French windows* R.)

FLORA (*calls*). Mother! (*Then crosses, picks up book and sits chair* L. *again.*)

MRS. ACKROYD (*enters from windows* R.). Yes, darling—what's the matter? (*Coming* C.) Flora, what's the matter with you? What's the matter with everybody? Aren't we going to play bridge to-night? Major Blunt's wandering up and down the Terrace like a lost soul.

FLORA. Mother, don't keep on nagging about Major Blunt.

MRS. ACKROYD. When he saw me, he dodged round the corner—what's he afraid of?

FLORA. If it comes to that, what are you afraid of, Mother? Spying on him!

MRS. ACKROYD. Spying, I?

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FLORA. Yes, dear, spying.

MRS. ACKROYD (*goes up* C.). Is your uncle still in his study?

FLORA. Yes, I suppose so. Doctor Sheppard's with him.

MRS. ACKROYD. No, he isn't. He left some time ago. Parker told me so. I'm quite worn out. I shall go to bed.

FLORA (*looks at clock*). What, Mother, at twenty minutes past nine?

MRS. ACKROYD. Yes, it seems early, doesn't it? but it's the only thing to do in this God-forsaken house. It's the only place where one can think over one's miseries in peace. (*Kisses her, then goes up* R., *turns.*) Oh, Flora—— It doesn't matter. (*Exits up* R.)

(FLORA *rises, goes up towards passage* R. BOURNE *comes down staircase* L. FLORA, *hearing a sound, turns and sees her.*)

FLORA. Hullo, Bourne! What are you doing in Mr. Ackroyd's bedroom?

BOURNE (L.C.). It's the housemaid's night out, Miss, and as the second housemaid isn't very well, I said I'd do the bedrooms for her.

FLORA. I see. But aren't you rather late?

BOURNE. Yes, Miss, I'm afraid I am—bedroom work is a little strange to me, and I'm afraid I've been rather slow.

FLORA. Good night.

BOURNE. Good night, Miss. (*Exits up* R.)

(FLORA *crosses to staircase* L. *and disappears.*)

(*At* FLORA'S *exit,* PARKER *enters from down* L. *with tray on which is bottle of whisky, siphon of soda, 4 glasses. He places tray on table* L.)

(RAYMOND *enters from up* R.)

(*Voice is heard speaking up* C., *in study.*)

RAYMOND (*stops, listening*). Who's that in there? Doctor Sheppard?

PARKER. No, sir. Doctor Sheppard has gone about——

RAYMOND. Ssh!

(*The voice in the study is heard to say:* "The calls on my purse have been so frequent of late that I fear it is impossible for me to accede to your request, and moreover . . .")

My word, he's telling somebody off to-night. Thank God it's not me!

PARKER. Yes, sir. (*Pours out whisky.*)

(BLUNT *enters from windows* R., *crosses to table* L.)

RAYMOND. Oh—I've been looking for you.

BLUNT. What are you doing, Parker?

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PARKER. Mixing you a drink, sir. (*Business with soda siphon.*)
BLUNT. Where is Miss Flora?
PARKER. Mrs. Ackroyd and Miss Flora have gone up to bed, sir.
BLUNT. Damn!
PARKER. I beg your pardon, sir?
BLUNT. I said damn and blast!
RAYMOND. Well, what about a game of snooker?
BLUNT. Oh, anything! (*Goes off* L., *taking his drink with him.*)
RAYMOND. Oh, Parker, you might bring the drinks into the billiard-room.

(RAYMOND *following* BLUNT *to door down* L.)

PARKER (*to* RAYMOND). You won't want anything more to-night, sir?
RAYMOND. No. (*Without turning, goes to door* L.)
PARKER. Thank God for that!
RAYMOND (*turning in doorway*). What's that?
PARKER. Nothing, sir—nothing.

(*After a quick look at* PARKER, RAYMOND *exits* L., *followed by* PARKER *with tray.*)

(PARKER *re-enters* L., *tiptoes to door* C., *listens, knocks twice, goes to windows* R., *closes them. Draws curtains, goes up* R., *turns off switch, goes into passage, switches off hall light.* FLORA *comes down stairs* L. *and as she reaches the* C. *doors* PARKER *changes his mind, re-enters, switches on hall light, and switches on lights up* R., *and comes back into room.* FLORA *is seen standing with her hand on the knob of the study door.*)

FLORA. Yes, Parker?
PARKER (*very surprised*). I beg pardon, Miss, I was just going to ask Sir Roger if there was anything else he wanted before I go up to bed.
FLORA. No, Parker, I've just said good night to him, and he asked me to tell you that he didn't want anything more this evening, and that you were not to disturb him.
PARKER. Very good, Miss. (*Moves to go up* R.)
FLORA. Is Major Blunt in the billiard-room?

(PARKER *having moved over* R. *by light switch,* R. *of arch, up* R. *Turns.*)

PARKER. Yes—Miss.
FLORA. You might tell him that I'll meet him on the Courts at ten in the morning. Good night. (*Crosses up* R. PARKER *is* R. *of her.*)
PARKER (*bowing as she passes him*). Good night, Miss.

(FLORA *exits up* R.)

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(PARKER *switches off lights.*)

(CURTAIN *descends to denote lapse of time.* CURTAIN *rises—stage in darkness. Bell rings off* R.*—a slight pause, then bell off* R. *rings again—*PARKER *switches on hall light—knocking is heard on windows* R.)

Who is that? Who is that?

DOCTOR (*outside*). It's Doctor Sheppard, let me in.

(PARKER *draws curtains, opens window.* DOCTOR *enters, carrying bag which he puts on chair below table* R. *He then goes* C. PARKER *closes windows. The* DOCTOR *is very agitated.*)

(C.) Where is he?

PARKER (R.C.). Who, sir?

DOCTOR. Your master?

PARKER. The master, sir?

DOCTOR. Yes, where is he?

PARKER. What do you mean, sir?

DOCTOR. Pull yourself together, man—the telephone message you sent me ten minutes ago.

PARKER. What message, sir?

DOCTOR. Man alive, you telephoned me that your master was dead—that he'd been murdered.

PARKER. The master murdered, sir?

DOCTOR. That's what you telephoned.

PARKER. Me, sir? I never telephoned any such thing.

DOCTOR. Parker!

PARKER. I did not, sir. (*Very definitely.*)

DOCTOR. Do you mean to say it's all a hoax! That's there's nothing the matter with Sir Roger?

PARKER. There's nothing the matter with Sir Roger as far as I know, sir. (*It suddenly strikes him.*) Excuse me, sir, did the person telephoning use my name?

DOCTOR. I'll tell you exactly what I heard on my telephone. I was with my sister and Monsieur Poirot. "Is that Doctor Sheppard? Parker, the butler at Fernly Park speaking. Will you please come at once, Sir Roger has been—(*pause*)—murdered."

PARKER. I don't understand it, sir. If it's a joke—it's a scandalous thing to do.

DOCTOR. You're right, it's a damnable thing to do. Where are Major Blunt and Mr. Raymond?

PARKER. In the billiard-room. The ladies have gone to bed.

DOCTOR. Is there a telephone in there?

PARKER. Yes, sir.

(DOCTOR *goes towards door* L. PARKER *starts to go up to the passage.*)

DOCTOR. Wait a minute, Parker.

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(PARKER *returns.* DOCTOR *goes to study door. Turns knob, then looking back at* PARKER, *greatly astonished.*)

The door's locked.

PARKER. Locked, sir? (*Comes up to door.*) Allow me, sir. (*Tries door, drops on one knee and puts eye to keyhole.*) Key's in the lock all right, sir, on the inside. Sir Roger must have locked himself in, and just dropped off to sleep.

DOCTOR. Parker, I'm going to wake your master up. (*Rattles knob, calling out.*) Roger! Roger! (*He listens, there is no answer.*) I don't want to disturb the household.

PARKER. That'll be all right, sir, there is no one within hearing.

(*The* DOCTOR *turns and begins hammering frantically on the door, calling loudly.*)

DOCTOR. Roger! Roger! It's Sheppard! Let me in. (*Comes down* C.) I don't like this.

PARKER. Neither do I, sir. (*They look at each other.*)

DOCTOR. I'm seriously alarmed about Sir Roger.

PARKER. So am I, sir.

DOCTOR. Look here, Parker, I'm going to force this door in, and you're going to help me. I'll take the responsibility.

PARKER. I don't think, sir (*hesitates*), but if you say so, sir.

DOCTOR (*firmly*). I do say so. I can't help feeling there's something wrong.

(DOCTOR *attempts to break the lock, but fails. He tells* PARKER *to kick the doors.* PARKER *does so several times, and succeeds in bursting open the doors. The double doors must be held by two men very firmly and not give the slightest, however hard* PARKER *and the* DOCTOR *fling their weight upon them: at the moment the doors burst open, a piece of wood is broken off stage and glass to give the effect of the crash. Sitting in arm-chair is* ACKROYD. *His head has fallen sideways, his body collapsed. Below the collar of his coat a dagger is sticking into him.*)

NOTE.—This is a trick dagger, see description, Property list, at end of book.

PARKER (*staggers back, calling out*). Oh, my God!—Look, sir!—Sir Roger——

DOCTOR. Quick, Parker, get my bag.

(PARKER *gets it from chair down* R. *and gives it to* DOCTOR.)

Go and get hold of Mr. Raymond.

(PARKER *starts to go.*)

Shut these doors, and ring up the police at once!

(PARKER *does so and exits* L.)

(RAYMOND *enters from down* L.)

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Raymond. Doctor Sheppard—Doctor Sheppard! (*Goes up, pushes open study doors—sees body in chair, turns and staggers out sobbing hysterically.*)

(Doctor *comes out of study carrying bag, which he places on settee.*)

(Parker *enters down* L.—*crosses to* R. *hurriedly.*)

Parker. I'll run down and see if the lodge gates are open. (*Exits* R.)

(Blunt *enters down* L. Doctor *indicates the corpse with a movement of his hand.* Blunt *goes up to study.*)

Blunt. Good God! (*Goes to* Raymond, *pats him on the shoulder.*)

(Raymond *moves down* R.C. *sobbing hysterically; and sits* L. *of table* R. Blunt *goes into study, looks round it and returns.*)

Mrs. Ackroyd and Flora? Can we keep this from them till the morning?

Raymond. There's no reason to tell them to-night.

Doctor. We'd better not do anything more till the police come.

Parker (*enters* R. *Touches* Raymond *on shoulder*). Mr. Raymond, Inspector Davies is here.

Raymond (*rises, goes up* R.C.). All right, Parker.

(Inspector Davies *enters, comes* R.C. Parker *switches on lights in room.*)

Inspector. Good evening, Doctor. Good evening, Mr. Raymond.

(Inspector *goes into room. Removes his cap.*)

This is shocking, sir—a good kind gentleman. (*Pause.*) Body been moved at all?

Doctor. No! Beyond making sure that life was extinct—I have not disturbed it in any way.

Inspector (*still in doorway, looking round*). *Anybody* moved anything?

Doctor. No!

(Doctor *moves to behind settee.*)

Inspector. I'll just . . .

(Raymond *indicates chair* R.C. Inspector *crosses to it, takes out note-book and sits.*)

Now then, let me know all about it. Might I inquire who found the body?

Doctor. Parker and I were the first. I received a telephone message from Parker.

Parker. I never sent a telephone message.

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INSPECTOR. One moment.

DOCTOR. I received a telephone message from Parker that Sir Roger was murdered—came here at once—the door was locked on the inside; I broke it in with the help of Parker, and found him!

INSPECTOR (*to* PARKER). How did you know he was murdered?

PARKER. I didn't know, Inspector. I never sent the telephone message! I've not been near the telephone all the evening. The other servants will bear me out in that.

INSPECTOR. Very odd, that. Can't understand it. (*To* DOCTOR.) Did it sound like Parker's voice, Doctor?

DOCTOR. When he said it was Parker, I naturally took it for granted.

INSPECTOR. Naturally. (*Pause.*) Who was the last person to see Sir Roger alive?

RAYMOND. Er . . . (*Goes* L.C.)

PARKER. Miss Ackroyd, Inspector, Miss Flora Ackroyd. Somewhere about a quarter to ten that would be; just before she retired for the night.

INSPECTOR. Well, first of all I must have a word with Miss—Ackroyd. (*With a movement of his hand towards the study.*) Does she know about this?

PARKER. No, Inspector!

INSPECTOR. All right, my lad. No need to tell her yet—she'll answer my questions better without being upset by knowing about Sir Roger.

(DOCTOR *goes behind settee.*)

(*To* RAYMOND, *who is going towards door* L. *Rises.*) Mr. Raymond, would you say there's been a burglary and ask her if she would mind coming down to answer a few questions.

RAYMOND. Very good, Inspector.

(*Exit* RAYMOND *up* R.)

INSPECTOR (*to* DOCTOR). How long should you say he's been dead, Doctor?

DOCTOR. Half an hour at least—perhaps longer.

INSPECTOR. Let's get this clear. The door was locked on the inside, you say?

DOCTOR. Yes.

INSPECTOR. What about the window?

PARKER. The window was open. I closed it earlier in the evening at Sir Roger's request.

INSPECTOR. It's open now, anyway. (*Sits* R.C.)

(RAYMOND *enters from up* R.)

RAYMOND. Miss Ackroyd will be down in a minute. I told her just what you suggested.

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INSPECTOR. Better close those doors.

(RAYMOND *crosses up* C. *Closes doors and goes* L.)

Thank you. (*To* PARKER.) Any strangers been to the front door to-night?

PARKER. No, sir.

INSPECTOR. What about the back?

PARKER. That I don't know, sir; but I'll make inquiries. (*Turns to go.*)

INSPECTOR (*snaps fingers. Sharply, stopping* PARKER). All right, my lad. I'll do my own inquiring. Give instructions that all servants are wanted downstairs. Say nothing of what has occurred. Only that they are wanted urgently—then return here.

(PARKER *moves to up* R.)

Oh, and tell one of my men to stand outside the front door and one outside this window.

PARKER. Yes, sir.

(*Exit* PARKER *up* R.)

INSPECTOR (*rises and goes* C. *to* BLUNT). Your name, sir?

BLUNT. Blunt—Major Blunt. I'm stopping here.

INSPECTOR. Major Blunt—B-l-u-n-t, is that correct, sir? (*Writes it down in his note-book.*)

(FLORA *enters hurriedly up* R. *wearing negligée; she looks alarmed.*)

Good evening, Miss Ackroyd. (*Turns. To* FLORA.) There's been an attempt at robbery, and we want you to help us if you can.

FLORA (*nervously*). I don't quite understand; what has been stolen? What do you want me to tell you?

INSPECTOR. It's just this, Miss Ackroyd. Parker says you came out of your uncle's study about a quarter to ten. Is that right?

FLORA. Quite right.

INSPECTOR. And the time is correct?

FLORA. It must have been about then—I can't say exactly. (*Anxiously.*) What has been stolen?

INSPECTOR (*hesitating*). We're not quite certain.

FLORA (*alarmed*). What is it? You are hiding something from me. Major Blunt. (*Appealing to him.*)

BLUNT (*beckons to* INSPECTOR, *rises and crosses* R. *to* FLORA *and says to* INSPECTOR:) I'll see to this.

(FLORA *stretches out a hand to* BLUNT; *he takes it and pats it gently as though trying to pacify a small child.*)

(PARKER *enters up* R. *and stands quietly by door.* RAYMOND *goes to fireplace.*)

It's bad news, Flora, bad news for all of us—your Uncle Roger——

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FLORA. Yes?

BLUNT. It will be a shock to you—bound to be—your uncle is dead.

FLORA. Dead—dead—what do you mean?

INSPECTOR. It's no use beating about the bush. Your uncle's been murdered. (*A step towards her.*) Must have been a few minutes after you left him, Miss Ackroyd.

(FLORA *sits* R.C., *and breaks down.* INSPECTOR *turns from her, then goes up and draws* DOCTOR *aside.*)

(*In low tones.*) Doctor Sheppard, do you mind coming into the study with me again? (*With a glance at* FLORA.) There are one or two things I want to ask you—and—— (*Drawing him farther away.*)

DOCTOR. Certainly—yes, by all means.

(DOCTOR *and* INSPECTOR *exeunt to study—pushing door to after them.*)

BLUNT. This business has knocked us all out. I've been in some pretty tight corners, but when it comes to——

FLORA (*starting up—wildly*). But—but we must *do* something! We can't just sit here—and—and——

BLUNT (*in pacifying tones*). Flora—Flora—the police are attending to everything.

FLORA (*contemptuously*). The police! (*Frantically.*) Oh, I've no confidence in them! (*Rises, goes* C.) Geoffrey!

RAYMOND. Yes?

FLORA. Monsieur Poirot—I'll telephone for him.

(*Goes off down* L.)

RAYMOND. Poirot—I wonder! (L.)

BLUNT (R.C.). Think he'll come? (*Crosses* L.)

(PARKER *comes quietly in up* R.)

RAYMOND (*dubiously, with a shake of his head*). I don't know—these big men are very touchy. You can't just say I want you, and expect 'em to turn up—they only take the cases they're really keen on. (*Turns and sees* PARKER *standing by door* R.C.) Hello, Parker! I didn't know you were there, Parker.

PARKER. Inspector told me to come back, sir.

BLUNT (*goes to doors* C., *then back*). This is a shocking business, this, Parker.

PARKER. It is, sir; and if you ask me I think there's blackmail at the bottom of it.

(RAYMOND *and* BLUNT *look astonished.*)

BLUNT. Blackmail?

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RAYMOND. What makes you think that?

(FLORA *enters* L. *quickly.* BLUNT *and* RAYMOND *turn.*)

FLORA (*comes* C.). I've telephoned Monsieur Poirot. (*Sits on settee.*)

BLUNT. Well?

FLORA (*to* RAYMOND). He's coming.

RAYMOND. Good!

(*Study door opens and* DOCTOR *enters followed by* INSPECTOR.)

INSPECTOR (*turning back to study*). I'll just take the precaution of shutting and latching that window.

(PARKER *goes up* R.)

(INSPECTOR *exits to study.*)

INSPECTOR *re-entering, closes study door.*

No one must enter this room till I return. Will you see to that, Doctor?

DOCTOR (C.). Certainly.

INSPECTOR (*to* PARKER). I'll question the servants now.

PARKER (*at opening* R.C.). Yes, sir.

INSPECTOR. Come with me.

(*Exit* INSPECTOR *followed by* PARKER *up* R.)

DOCTOR (*sits stool* C.). The Inspector's not losing any time. I must say he's very thorough. He's made the most careful examination of every little detail of the study. I gather he's already got a strong suspicion.

FLORA. Which I'm sure is all wrong.

DOCTOR (*turning*). How can you be sure when you don't know what it is?

FLORA. I know Inspector Davies, that's quite enough for me.

DOCTOR. You've no confidence in him?

FLORA. No!

BLUNT. Of course she hasn't—neither have I!

RAYMOND. Anyhow, we're in his hands.

FLORA. Why! When we've got one of the greatest detectives living here! Monsieur Poirot! He was a friend of Uncle Roger's too; I'm sure he'll help us.

RAYMOND (*emphatically*). Flora dear, I don't think he'd interfere now the police have charge of the case.

FLORA. Well, I've telephoned him to come, anyway, and I'm going to try and persuade him.

DOCTOR. Well done, Flora! but I don't know whether you'll get him to come. I tried to persuade him myself, but he didn't want to interfere yet.

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RAYMOND. I wonder whether we're doing the right thing.

FLORA (*hesitating*). W-w-w-why do you s-s-say that, Geoffrey?

BLUNT. If you'll be guided by me; I advise you not to drag this French bloke into this case.

FLORA (*indignantly*). I know why you say that. It's exactly for that reason I'm so anxious to have him. You're afraid! Well, I'm not. I know Ralph better than you do.

BLUNT. My dear, I wasn't thinking of Ralph.

FLORA. Then why are you all afraid of being found out?

(BLUNT *doesn't answer.*)

You can't answer me. Just because Caryl thought she saw Ralph in the village, you all suspect him, and the police may suspect him too—anyhow Monsieur Poirot will find out the truth.

(INSPECTOR *enters up* R.)

INSPECTOR. I've questioned the servants. They all declare that no one has been to the back door to-night. But I don't quite like Parker's manner— He sent that telephone call all right. Anyway, we can find out the truth about it from the Exchange. If it was put through from here, I don't see how anyone else but Parker could have sent it. (*Crossing to study door.*) The weapon ought to give us a clue to things. (*Opening door.*) It's something quite unusual.

(INSPECTOR *exits to study, pushing door to after him.*)

(*A bell is heard at entrance door.*)

(FLORA *rises, goes behind settee to* C.)

DOCTOR. That must be our friend Poirot. (*Crosses* R.)

(POIROT *enters and, advances to* FLORA, *takes her hand.*)

POIROT. It is terrible! I offer Mademoiselle all my sympathy. I was with the Doctor and Mees Caryl when the telephone message arrived. I did not like to come—it would seem impertinent. In what way can I serve you, Mees Flora?

DOCTOR. Miss Ackroyd wants you to—to——

FLORA. —to find out who did this horrible thing.

POIROT. But the police—they will do that.

FLORA. I'm afraid they might make a mistake—they're only local men—they haven't your great genius. *Please*, Monsieur Poirot, won't you help us? My uncle was your friend, that's why I asked you.

POIROT. And you were right. But you understand, Mees Flora, if I take this case, I shall go through with it to the end.

(FLORA *moves back to* DOCTOR.)

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The good dog, he does not leave the scent, remember. You may wish that after all you had left it to the local police.

FLORA. I want the truth.

POIROT (*up to her*). All the truth ?

(FLORA *nods.*)

(*Quickly.*) Then I accept ! Who of the police is in charge ?

DOCTOR. Inspector Davies. He's in the study now, making a further examination.

POIROT (*to* FLORA). You permit ? (*Crosses to study.*) I will see him. I will explain, Mees Flora, that I only watch the case for you. (*Kisses her hand. He opens the study door, we hear him say :*) Pardon, Monsieur l'Inspecteur . . .

INSPECTOR (*in study*). Hullo, Monsieur Poirot.

(POIROT *exits into study, pushing door to behind him.*)

FLORA (*crosses to* DOCTOR R.). Mother, she doesn't know yet ?

DOCTOR. She ought to be told to-night. Will you tell her, Flora, or would you prefer me to do it ?

FLORA (*hesitating slightly*). No—no thank you, I think I'd better. I'll go to her now.

(FLORA *exits door up* R.)

RAYMOND (*sits chair* L.). I say, Doctor, what's this we hear about blackmail ?

DOCTOR (R. *of settee. Sharply*). Blackmail ! Who said anything about blackmail ?

RAYMOND. Parker burbled something about it—seemed to have some sort of idea that was at the bottom of it.

BLUNT. Do you think there's anything in it ? (*Sits on settee.*)

DOCTOR (*sits stool* C.). If Parker said anything about blackmail he must have been listening. When I was leaving the study, I met him just outside—I remember, because I ran into him.

BLUNT. The study door. What was to prevent him returning there when everybody else was out of the way ?

RAYMOND. Nothing !

BLUNT. He could have locked the door on the inside—committed the murder and gone out through the window.

RAYMOND. But he wouldn't telephone the doctor.

DOCTOR (C.). No ? Quite possible ! Might have done it to avert suspicion from himself, and when I came in answer, suddenly got a panic and denied all knowledge of it.

(INSPECTOR *and* POIROT *enter from study*—INSPECTOR *is holding dagger by the tip of blade, so as not to touch the handle. He has a glass in his hand which he had brought from the study.*)

INSPECTOR. Quite a work of art. Curio, I should think. Can't be many of these about ! (*He drops dagger deftly into glass.*)

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(DOCTOR, BLUNT *and* RAYMOND *watch him do this—apparently quite enthralled.*)

(*To* DOCTOR, BLUNT *and* RAYMOND.) Monsieur, there's not going to be much mystery about this crime—take a look at the hilt of this dagger. I daresay they're not apparent to you, Monsieur, but I can see them clearly enough. *Finger-prints!*

RAYMOND. Why, that's the Moorish dagger you gave Sir Roger, Blunt. We used to use it as a paper-knife.

BLUNT (*casually*). Yes, that's the one! What of it?

(RAYMOND *in French to* POIROT.)

POIROT. You recognized it when you saw the body?

BLUNT. Yes.

INSPECTOR. Major Blunt, you said nothing to me about it.

BLUNT. No, I didn't. Why should I?

POIROT. Did Sir Ackroyd keep it in his study?

RAYMOND. No, it was left about the room——

POIROT. Then anyone could get the dagger at any time?

RAYMOND. Yes.

INSPECTOR. I don't think we need go into that question further now, Monsieur Poirot. I shall be coming up in the morning with Colonel Melrose—the chief constable. I've got a couple of men outside the house, and I'll send one of them along in case you want him. (*Crosses* R.) I shall give him instructions to allow no one inside the room but yourself.

POIROT. I thank you, Monsieur l'Inspecteur.

INSPECTOR (*taking up the glass containing the dagger*). I'll just borrow this glass to-night, Mr. Raymond, if you'll allow me—I don't want to run the risk of blurring any of the finger-prints on the hilt. (*To* RAYMOND.) I'll notify the Coroner at once.

RAYMOND. Oh, certainly, Inspector.

INSPECTOR. Good night, gentlemen. (*Crosses to entrance door, carrying glass carefully.*)

(RAYMOND, BLUNT *and* DOCTOR *murmur* "Good night.")

POIROT. Good night, Inspecteur. We shall meet in the morning.

INSPECTOR. Right, sir.

(*Exits up* R.)

(POIROT *regards them silently for a moment. Comes down* R.C.)

POIROT. I should like a few words with Monsieur le Docteur.

BLUNT. Let's go into the billiard-room?

(BLUNT *and* RAYMOND *start to go.*)

POIROT. Monsieur le Major—do not go too far, please.

(*They exit down* L.)

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(*Sits on settee.*) Monsieur le Docteur, I understand that Sir Ackroyd was affianced to Mrs. Ferrars. Monsieur le Docteur, you did not tell me the true story to-night at your house of Mrs. Ferrars' death.

Doctor. As a matter of fact, I didn't! I don't talk of the private affairs of my patients. (*Sits* c.) But I'm glad you've brought the matter up. I'd already practically decided to tell you everything, but was waiting for a favourable opportunity. Mrs. Ferrars committed suicide.

Poirot. And the cause?

Doctor. Sir Roger told me to-night, that she had confessed to him. . . . It's a terrible thing to say——

Poirot. Tell me, docteur.

Doctor. —that she had poisoned her husband.

Poirot (*surprised—quickly*). Tiens! And then?

Doctor. That some one knew it, was threatening her with exposure and blackmailing her. She refused to tell him at the time who it was—said he should hear from her within twenty-four hours. That night she committed suicide.

Poirot. And it was to tell you this Sir Ackroyd asked you to dinner?

Doctor. Yes. And to ask my advice.

Poirot. About what?

Doctor. As to what would be his best course of action in view of the confession Mrs. Ferrars had made. But he could not bring himself to believe that she would die without leaving him a final word. He had the strongest conviction that there would still come to him a message, giving him the name of the blackmailer.

Poirot. And what was your advice?

Doctor. Well, we finally agreed that if no message came he would let the matter rest—avoid all publicity and so prevent the scandal touching Mrs. Ferrars' name after her death.

Poirot. I see. (*Sharply.*) Well?

Doctor. Just as dinner was announced a letter in a long blue envelope was brought to him—it was directed in Mrs. Ferrars' writing; Ackroyd put it in his pocket, whispering to me that he'd read it with me in his study after dinner. As soon as it was over we went straight to his study. He was labouring under an acute nervous tension—a few seconds after we went into the room, the latch of the door seemed to give way slightly: "What's that?" he almost shrieked. I went quickly to the door—there was no one there that I could see—then he looked nervously at the window and asked me to make sure it was shut and fastened securely.

Poirot. And you did?

Doctor. Yes.

Poirot. Why, do you suppose, did he ask that?

Doctor. I don't know. He asked me the same question before

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dinner here; said he'd a queer feeling that he was being watched —spied upon.

POIROT. When you went to the study, where were his relations and the others? (*With a nod towards* RAYMOND *and* BLUNT.)

DOCTOR. Oh, about the house. Of course I couldn't swear to where they were exactly.

POIROT. The letter? He read it to you.

DOCTOR. Just the beginning. It was very affecting. Then he suddenly stopped: "Sheppard," he said, "forgive me but I must finish this alone." Of course I left him. As I came out of the study door I ran into Parker—he seemed confused, and looked at me as though he'd been listening at the door—I told him rather sharply that Sir Roger wished particularly not to be disturbed by anyone, and he was to see that he wasn't. That must have been about nine —no, ten minutes to—because I heard the church clock strike nine as I passed the lodge gates. Now you know all I know.

(POIROT *rises, rings bell, goes to door* L., *opens it quickly, closes it again, and comes* C., *then goes up to* L. *of study doors.*)

POIROT. Docteur, where was Sir Ackroyd in the study when you left him?

DOCTOR (*rises, and goes up to* R. *of study door*). Sitting in the arm-chair.

POIROT (*at door* C.). As he is now?

DOCTOR. Yes.

POIROT. And the letter?

DOCTOR. He had laid it down on the desk at his side.

POIROT (*coming down*). But I have made a very minute examination of that room, and I have found no long blue envelope or letter! (*Rings bell, slowly as though pondering carefully over his words.*) Monsieur le docteur, it appears as if we have here the motive for the murder of our friend Ackroyd.

(PARKER *enters up* R.)

PARKER. You rang, sir!

POIROT. When you entered this room to-night with Doctor Sheppard, did you notice a letter in a long blue envelope?

PARKER. No, sir.

POIROT. Will you ask Major Blunt and Mr. Raymond to come here.

(PARKER *exits down* L.)

DOCTOR. Perhaps the name of the blackmailer wasn't in the letter at all.

POIROT. Then why send a letter? It was to tell him that she wrote it.

DOCTOR. That's what I thought.

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Poirot (*makes a rough plan of the study in his note-book, closes the doors, and sits chair* R.C. *To* Doctor). Monsieur le Docteur, you have examined the body thoroughly?

Doctor (*coming* C.). Yes.

Poirot. Well?

Doctor. In my opinion the blow was struck by a right-handed person standing behind Ackroyd, and death must have been instantaneous—by the expression on his face, I should say the blow was unexpected. It is quite likely he died without knowing who struck the blow.

(Raymond *enters from* L. *with drink, which he places on mantelpiece —goes to fire, lights cigarette.*)

Poirot. How long should you say he'd been dead when you found him?

Doctor. I should say—er—about half an hour; perhaps a little longer.

Poirot. Then he was killed between ten minutes to nine, after you left, and ten o'clock.

Doctor. That's as near as I can get it.

Poirot. I will get nearer.

Raymond (*coming* C., *behind settee*). Excuse me, but Sir Roger was certainly alive at half-past nine, for I heard his voice in the study.

Poirot. Who was he talking to?

(Blunt *enters down* L. *and goes to fire.*)

Raymond. That I don't know. I came in here, looking for Major Blunt, when I heard his voice.

(Doctor *moves over and sits on settee.*)

(Flora *enters up* R.)

Flora. May I come in? (*Coming down* R.)

Poirot (*quickly*). Mais oui, Mees Flora. (*Continuing.*) Now, who could have been with him at half-past nine? (*Suddenly to* Blunt.) Was it you, Monsieur le Major?

Blunt (*at fire*). Never saw him after dinner.

Poirot (*to* Raymond). You say you heard his voice—did you hear what he said?

Raymond. I did just catch a fragment of it—he appeared to be very angry—as far as I can remember the exact words were . . .

Poirot. Pas trop vite, please. (*Sits* R.C.) I will write them down.

(Blunt *sits chair* L.)

Raymond. "The calls on my pocket—no—purse have been so frequent of late that I fear it will be impossible for me to accede to your request." Something of that sort.

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POIROT (*puzzled*). That is curious—I don't quite see—— (*Pauses, then quickly puts pocket-book away—emphatically.*)

(PARKER *enters* L., *crosses front and up* C.)

One thing is clear, Sir Ackroyd was alive at nine-thirty—after that we know nothing.

PARKER (C.). Pardon me, sir, Miss Flora saw him after that—she was coming out of the room . . .

FLORA (*quickly*). Yes——

POIROT (*stops her. Snaps fingers. To* PARKER). What time was that?

PARKER. About a quarter to ten, sir. It was after that Miss Flora told me Sir Roger wasn't to be disturbed again to-night.

POIROT. Did he send Mees Flora to you with that message?

PARKER. Not exactly, sir. I was just going to ask the master if he wanted anything more, when Miss Flora stopped me and said her uncle didn't want to be disturbed.

POIROT (*sitting* R.C. *Sharply*). But you had already been told by Doctor Sheppard that Meester Ackroyd did not want to be disturbed.

PARKER (*flustered and stammering*). No, sir. Yes, sir, I beg pardon, sir. Quite so, sir.

POIROT. What time was that?

PARKER. When the doctor went, sir, at ten minutes to nine.

POIROT. And yet you were going to disturb him?

PARKER. I'd forgotten, sir. At least, I mean, I always go about that time, sir, and ask if there's anything more, and I thought—well I was doing the usual thing without thinking.

POIROT (*gives* PARKER *a searching look, turns to* FLORA). Now, Mees Flora, please.

(PARKER *backs up* R.)

FLORA. I went into the study to say good night to Uncle.

POIROT. At a quarter to ten?

FLORA. I can't say exactly—it might have been later.

POIROT. Was your uncle alone?

FLORA. Yes.

POIROT. Did you notice if the study window was open or shut?

FLORA. I can't say—the curtains were drawn.

POIROT. What did you talk about?

FLORA (*slight pause*). Well—I—er—I went in, and said "Good night, Uncle; I'm going to bed now." I kissed him——

(PARKER *and* RAYMOND *look at her.*)

—and he said something about my looking nice in my new frock——

(PARKER *looks at* RAYMOND.)

—then he told me to run away—as he was busy. So I went.

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Poirot. Did he ask specially not to be disturbed?

Flora. Oh yes, I forgot—he said, "tell Parker I don't want anything more and that he's not to disturb me." I met Parker just outside the door and gave him Uncle's message.

Poirot. Just so. (*To* Blunt.) Monsieur le Major, are you quite sure you haven't seen Sir Ackroyd since dinner?

Blunt (*at fire*). Didn't see him—heard his voice.

Poirot (r.c.). Ah! How was that possible?

Blunt. Well, if you must know, I was out on the terrace.

Poirot. What time was that?

Blunt. About half-past nine. I was walking in front of the dining-room windows smoking, and I heard Sir Roger talking.

Poirot. You could not hear a voice in the study from the dining-room terrace?

Blunt (*embarrassed*). I—er—I went as far as the corner of the house.

Poirot. What for?

Blunt. I saw a woman disappearing behind a hedge.

Poirot. Who was it?

Blunt. Well, at first I thought it might—it might have been Miss Ackroyd—it was only a gleam of white, you know, but afterwards I thought . . .

Poirot. Yes?

Blunt. I might have been mistaken, you know . . .

Poirot. Who did you *think* it was?

Blunt. Well—er—I thought it looked like what's her name—Bourne—the parlourmaid. It was when I was standing at the corner of the terrace I heard Sir Roger's voice speaking to his secretary.

Raymond (*on settee*). I told you, Blunt, I was not in the study to-night at any time.

Blunt. No, no, old chap, I know you weren't; but I took it for granted it was you, because before I went out you said something about taking some papers to him.

Poirot. One thing is clear—Sir Ackroyd was speaking to someone at half-past nine. To whom? To whom? (*Pointing to stairs.*) That leetle staircase—where does he go?

Parker (*moves down a step*). To Sir Roger's bedroom and bathroom, sir.

Poirot. And then?

Parker. Nothing else, sir. There *once* was a door through to the rest of the house, but Sir Roger had it blocked up. He liked to feel his suite was entirely private.

Poirot. Ah! yes. I see. Now bring the parlourmaid.

(Parker *turns to go.*)

(*Stops him.*) No, one moment, Parker. Come here. (*To* Flora.)

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Mees Flora, I would like—with your assistance, to make a leetle experiment—(*apologetically*)—that is if you will consent.

FLORA. Certainly. What is it?

POIROT. I *should* like you and Parker—er—to go again through that little scene before you went to bed, Mees Flora. Just as it happened. It is a leetle method of mine.

FLORA (*nervously—stammering*). Oh—yes—er—yes—if you wish.

POIROT (*quickly*). I thank you. (*Turns his chair sideways.*)

(DOCTOR *on settee.* RAYMOND *back of settee.* BLUNT *sitting* L.)

(*Genially.*) Now I beg of you, let us have everything of the most exact.

PARKER. Excuse me, sir, but the hall was in darkness.

POIROT. Why was that?

PARKER. I'd switched off the lights for the night. I thought Miss Flora had retired.

POIROT. I see! I see! And you came from . . .?

PARKER (*up* R.). Here, sir.

POIROT. So! And Mademoiselle was where?

FLORA. At the study door.

PARKER. Quite right, sir.

FLORA. I had just closed the door.

PARKER. Yes, Miss. Your hand was still on the knob, when I switched on the light.

POIROT. Good! Now! Allez! Play me the little comedy!

(PARKER *switches off light by the door* R.C. *and—exits.*)

(FLORA *stands waiting. The hall is now in darkness. There is a slight pause*—PARKER *switches on light by door* R.C. FLORA *is standing with her hand on the knob of study door*—PARKER *close to her.*)

(*When* PARKER *re-enters from passage at commencement of this scene.*) Why you come back?

PARKER. I was going up the passage when I thought I heard some one distinctly.

POIROT. You were right. Allez!

FLORA. Yes, Parker!

PARKER. Beg pardon, Miss. I was just going to ask Mr. Ackroyd if there was anything more he wanted before I go up to bed.

FLORA. No, Parker. I've just said good night to him, and he asked me to tell you that he didn't want anything more to-night, and didn't want to be disturbed. (*To* PARKER *in an undertone.*) Tell Major Blunt I'll meet him on the Courts at ten. (*Turning to* POIROT.) Is that enough? (*To* POIROT, *who bows.*)

POIROT. Parker. Were the windows (*pointing to windows* R.) open or shut?

PARKER. Open, sir. I closed them.

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(PARKER *is standing* R.C., *quietly waiting.*)

POIROT (*rises*). Admirable! Admirable! Now I will see the parlourmaid.

(*Exit* PARKER R.C.)

FLORA (*to* POIROT). Has your little experiment been successful? I don't quite understand . . .

BLUNT. Quite so. I suppose I'm a damned fool, but I don't see the point it of all.

POIROT. No? Well, my friend; I know *now* something I wanted to know. Let us leave it at that. Now the parlourmaid who was in the garden to-night—what for? It is not usual?

RAYMOND (*casually*). Most likely to meet a man—they are not allowed in the house.

POIROT. Ah! We must find this man! (*To* FLORA.) The parlourmaid, Mees Flora, she has charge of this room, and all the salons,—she cleans—she dusts it—hein?

DOCTOR (*suddenly—snapping his fingers*). Oh! . . .

POIROT (*quickly*). Yes?

DOCTOR. I don't know if it has any significance—it may be only a trivial thing——

POIROT. But it may not! Tell me, Doctor——

DOCTOR. When I arrived to-night for dinner she was in here at this table—and the Moorish dagger was in the book on the mantelpiece.

RAYMOND. Quite right, Doctor. It was used as a paper-knife.

POIROT. You're quite sure?

DOCTOR. I——

POIROT (*holding up his hand for silence*). Phist!

(PARKER *enters, followed by* BOURNE.)

PARKER. The parlourmaid, sir.

(*Exit* PARKER R.C.)

POIROT (*beckons to* BOURNE). You are Ursula Bourne!

BOURNE (*up* R.). Yes, sir.

POIROT. What time was it when you went into the garden to-night?

BOURNE (*confused*). In the garden, sir? I—I——

POIROT. I will save you from telling me the lie—Major Blunt saw you.

BOURNE (*sullenly*). Yes, I was there, sir.

POIROT. Why?

BOURNE. I went out to post a letter in the box by the gate.

POIROT. At what time was that?

BOURNE. About half-past nine, sir.

POIROT. Did you meet a man in the garden?

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BOURNE. No, sir. I did not.
POIROT. What time did you return to the house?
BOURNE. About twenty minutes to ten.
POIROT. Did anyone see you come in?
BOURNE. Not that I know of, sir.
POIROT. Then where did you go?
BOURNE. To my room.
POIROT. Were you alone in your room?
BOURNE. Yes, sir, I have a room to myself. I stayed there till ten o'clock.
POIROT. Then where did you go?
BOURNE. Down to the servants' hall. (*Slight pause.*)
POIROT. Your master was killed with a Moorish dagger which was in a book on the mantelpiece.
BOURNE. I—I didn't know that, sir.
POIROT. The doctor says you were at that mantelpiece to-night.
BOURNE. Er—er—yes, sir. I took away some glasses.
POIROT. Was the dagger there then?
BOURNE. Yes, sir, in the book.
POIROT. You are sure?
BOURNE. Yes—no—I'm not absolutely sure.
POIROT (*turns and looks at* BOURNE). Thank you, Mademoiselle.

(BOURNE *exits up* R.)

(C.) Did any of you by any chance see the dagger after dinner? Well, then, for the present, we take the word of the parlourmaid. It is clear that anyone had the chance of taking the dagger after seven o'clock.

(*There is a slight pause.*)

(*Rises. Very quietly.*) Madame——

(FLORA *goes to him.*)

I will not detain you any longer—your mother, Mees Flora—she knows what has happened?
FLORA. Yes, I told her. She is absolutely appalled . . .
POIROT. Naturally. I will not disturb her further to-night. It is already late. I can see her to-morrow. (*Very gently takes her hand, and pats it.*)
DOCTOR (*rises, picks up bag*). I'm just coming, Flora. Good night, Poirot. (*Shakes hands.*)
POIROT. I shall see you in the morning.

(*Exit* FLORA *up* R. *and* DOCTOR.)

RAYMOND (*to* POIROT). Do you want me any more? I've got a tremendous lot to do.
POIROT. No, Monsieur Raymond. Good night, and thank you.

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(RAYMOND *says* "Good night" *and shakes hands with* POIROT.)
(*Exits up* R.)

BLUNT (*crossing to up* R. *Then turning to* POIROT *sarcastically.*) Bon soir, Monsieur Poirot or whatever you say.

POIROT (C.). Bon soir, Monsieur le Major!

BLUNT (*calling outside*). Raymond!

(*Exits up* R.)

(POIROT *stands perfectly still for a moment, then he goes to door down* L., *listens—locks the door—crosses up* R., *switches off the lights—brings chair from* L. *of table* R. *to* C., *opens study doors; walks into study, looks around the room, walks to windows, examines them, comes round, kneels close to the body* C. L. *of same, comes down, turns chair* R.C. *round facing up stage, sits chair* C. *facing up to the study; gives a little cough.* PARKER *in his shirt sleeves comes into the hall, whistling softly, switches off the hall light, and goes off* R. POIROT *sits puffing his cigar; in the darkness the red glow of the cigar is seen. There is a pause as* POIROT *sits watching the scene. Then slow*

CURTAIN.)

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ACT II.

SCENE.—*Same as Act I.*

TIME.—*The next morning.*

(*At rise of* CURTAIN, INSPECTOR DAVIES *is seated* R. *of table* L.C., *making notes in his notebook. There is a slight pause—he then rises, puts notebook in his pocket—goes over to mantelpiece for his cap, which he has left there.*)

(POIROT *and* DOCTOR *enter together up* R.)

POIROT. Bon jour, Monsieur l'Inspecteur. (*Comes down, places hat and gloves on* R. *end of settee. The* DOCTOR *comes down* R.C.)

DOCTOR. Good morning, Davies.

INSPECTOR. Good morning, Doctor. Glad to see you, Monsieur Poirot. I was just about to go. (*Has a very pleased and self-satisfied air.*)

POIROT. I am a leetle late this morning.

INSPECTOR (*standing in front of fireplace, with a wave of his hand indicating the room*). Colonel Melrose, my chief, was anxious to get to work early. He was sorry he was obliged to go without seeing you this morning. (*To* POIROT.) Well, I've got some news for you.

POIROT. En verité? Good! (*Sits on settee.*)

INSPECTOR. That telephone call has been traced. It was put through to Doctor Sheppard at ten-fifteen last night from a public call office at King's Abbot Station. (*Pointedly.*) And, at *ten twenty-three the night mail leaves for Liverpool.*

DOCTOR (*pulls chair* R.C. *away from table*). That's quick work, Inspector. You'll make inquiries at the station, of course?

POIROT. Naturellement!

INSPECTOR. We've already done so.

DOCTOR (*sharply*). Well?

INSPECTOR. With no success, so far.

POIROT (*sharply*). No?

DOCTOR. I don't believe you'll ever have any success with that.

INSPECTOR. You see, Monsieur Poirot, it's like this. At that time of night several trains come in, one after the other, the Liverpool express arrives at ten-nineteen and leaves at ten-twenty-three.

DOCTOR. The whole place is in a bustle. The chances of one particular person being noticed telephoning or getting away by the express are very small indeed.

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INSPECTOR. Why the fellow telephoned at all beats me.

POIROT. Be sure there was a reason. (*Takes out tobacco-pouch and papers.*) This case is very curious and interesting. (*Stoops down, rolling cigarette.*)

INSPECTOR (*with an air of casual dismissal facing away to* L.). This isn't going to be much of a case.

POIROT. You think so? (*Looking up.*)

INSPECTOR. Yes. I'm sorry too. A nice young fellow gone wrong. I'm a local man and I've seen Captain Paton about many times. I'm not wanting him to be the guilty one, but it looks bad whichever way you look at it.

(POIROT *continues to make his cigarette, puts away pouch, etc.*)

DOCTOR. I'm sure you're mistaken about Captain Paton—I've known him since he was a boy.

INSPECTOR (*tonelessly*). Maybe . . .

DOCTOR (*sharply*). What have you got against him?

INSPECTOR. He left the White Horse just on nine last night—seen in the neighbourhood of Fernly Park somewhere about nine-thirty. *Not been seen since.* Known to be in serious money difficulties. (*To* POIROT.) I'm trying to judge the thing fair and square, but it looks bad, Monsieur Poirot, whichever way you look at it.

POIROT (*mildly, about to light his cigarette*). I'm afraid I shall not be able to be of much use to you then.

INSPECTOR (*soothingly*). Next time, perhaps. Though we don't have many murders in this part of the world. (*Laughs.*)

(DOCTOR *sits on stool* C.)

POIROT (*with an admiring look*). You have been of marvellous promptness. How exactly did you go to work—if I may ask?

INSPECTOR (*takes notebook out of pocket—sits chair* L., *which is near fireplace*). First of all, method. Sir Roger was last seen alone by his niece—Miss Flora Ackroyd, at a quarter to ten. That's a fact, isn't it?

POIROT (*knocking the ash from his cigarette*). If you say so.

INSPECTOR. At half-past ten the doctor here says Sir Roger's been dead at last half an hour.

POIROT. Yes, half an hour—or *longer.*

INSPECTOR. Very good. That gives us exactly a quarter of an hour in which the crime must have been committed. I've made a list—(*holding out paper*) of every one in the house, and worked through it, setting down opposite their names what they were doing between nine forty-five and ten p.m. (*Hands paper to* POIROT. *Puts pocket-book in his pocket.*)

(POIROT *glances down it.*)

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Except for something fishy about Parker, they all seem quite all right.

POIROT. A very complete list. (*Is handing list back to* INSPECTOR.)

INSPECTOR (*with a wave of the hand*). No, I made that copy for you. (*Tapping his pocket.*) I have it all down in my note-book.

POIROT (*putting paper in his pocket*). I thank you—Monsieur l'Inspecteur.

INSPECTOR. Well, that list disposes pretty clearly of the household. Now we come to a very serious point. The woman at the lodge—was pulling the blinds down last night, when she saw Captain Paton turn in at the gate and go up towards the house.

DOCTOR. Was she sure of that?

INSPECTOR. Quite sure. She knows him so well; he was walking very quickly, and turned up the path to the right which leads past the summer-house, and is a short cut to the terrace.

POIROT. What time was that?

INSPECTOR. Exactly twenty-five minutes past nine.

(*Slight pause.*)

POIROT. How long would it take him to reach the terrace?

DOCTOR. Oh, two or three minutes at the outside.

POIROT. And if he went straight up the drive to the house?

DOCTOR. Five minutes at the outside.

POIROT (*significantly*). Ah, *only* five minutes.

INSPECTOR. It fits in without a flaw. (*On his fingers to emphasize.*) At twenty-five minutes past nine Captain Paton is seen passing the lodge—he is known to be in money difficulties; at nine-thirty Mr. Raymond hears some one in here asking for money and Sir Roger refusing. What happens next? (*Rises, goes* C.) Captain leaves the same way—through the window. He walks along the terrace angry and baffled—comes to the open window (*pointing to window* R). Miss Ackroyd is saying good night to her uncle. Major Blunt and Mr. Raymond are in the billiard-room. Mrs. Ackroyd has gone to bed. He steals in and takes the dagger from the book and returns to the study. It was a fine dry night, as you know; his shoes leave no marks—he goes in and—well, I don't need to go into details. (*He is up* C.)

DOCTOR. No.

INSPECTOR (*comes down* C.). Then he slips out again and is off. Hadn't the nerve to go back to the inn; makes for the station and rings up the doctor from there . . .

POIROT (*softly*). Why?

INSPECTOR. Eh! (*Astonished that there should be any question.*)

DOCTOR. Yes, why?

INSPECTOR (*thinking*). Well, it's difficult to say why he did *that*. But murderers do funny things sometimes. I've only struck one snag. I can't find anyone who saw him at the station; and yet

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he's well known down here. You'd think somebody would have noticed him. Can't get any news from Liverpool either.

Doctor. You think he went to Liverpool?

Inspector. Well, it's on the cards. That telephone message just a few minutes before the Liverpool express left—that ought to mean something.

Doctor. Unless it was deliberately intended to throw you off the scent.

Inspector. That's an idea. (*To* Poirot.) Do you think that's the explanation of it, Monsieur Poirot?

Poirot. Mon ami, I do not know; (*rising*) but I will tell you this; I believe when we find the explanation of the telephone call—we shall find the explanation of the murder. (*Goes to mantelpiece for matches—lights cigarette.*)

Inspector. I wouldn't count too much on that. We've better clues than that, Monsieur Poirot. The finger-prints, for instance.

Poirot (*to behind* c. *of settee*). Monsieur l'Inspecteur, beware of the leetle street that has no end to it.

(Inspector *stares at him blankly.*)

Doctor. You mean a blind alley.

Poirot. Yes! The street that leads nowhere.

Inspector. I suppose you're hinting that the finger-prints are faked. I've read of such things being done, but I've never come across it in my experience. But fake or no fake, they're bound to lead *some*where.

(Poirot *merely shrugs his shoulders, flinging out widely his arms.* Inspector *annoyed.*)

Come now, Monsieur Poirot, you've got to admit those finger-prints were made by some one who was in the house last night!

Poirot. Bien entendu! (*Nodding his head.*)

Inspector. Eh! Well, I've taken the prints of every one who was in the house last night—and they none of them correspond. That leaves only Captain Paton; and we're going to get that young gentleman's as soon as we can lay hands on him. When we get those . . .

Poirot. Much valuable time may have been lost.

Inspector (*staring incredulously at* Poirot). I don't quite get you, Monsieur Poirot.

Poirot (*at settee*). You have taken the prints of every one in the house, you say. Is that the exact truth you are telling me there, Monsieur l'Inspecteur?

Inspector (*annoyed*). Certainly!

Poirot. Without overlooking anyone?

Inspector. Without overlooking anyone!

Poirot. The quick *and* the dead?

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INSPECTOR (*in wondering tones*). You mean . . . ?

POIROT (*quietly*). The dead.

(*There is a slight pause, during which* INSPECTOR *looks blankly at* POIROT.)

(*Sitting on settee.*) Ecoutez—mon ami. I am suggesting that the finger-prints on the dagger hilt are those of Sir Ackroyd himself.

INSPECTOR. You're not serious ?

POIROT (*casually*). It is an easy matter to verify. His body is still available.

INSPECTOR. But what would be the point of it ? You're surely not suggesting suicide, Monsieur Poirot ?

POIROT. Ah, no, no. My theory is that the murderer wore gloves. After the blow was struck, he picked up his victim's hand and closed it round the dagger.

DOCTOR. But why ?

POIROT. To make a confusing case more confusing.

INSPECTOR. What gave you that idea ?

POIROT (*rising*). I know very leetle of loops and wiggles—see—I confess my ignorance frankly. But it occurred to me that the position of the prints was a leetle awkward. Not so would I have held a dagger in order to strike. (*Making a movement as if stabbing.*)

INSPECTOR. That's an idea, Monsieur Poirot. I'll look into it. Good day, gentlemen. (*Turns to them.*) By the way, I'm going off to Liverpool to-day.

POIROT. Bon voyage.

INSPECTOR. Eh !

POIROT. Bon voyage.

INSPECTOR. If I don't see you again before I leave, any help you want, you know they'll be only too glad at headquarters to give you.

(*Goes out through open window* R.)

POIROT. Thank you, thank you, Monsieur l'Inspecteur. (*Goes over to fireplace and facing fire.*)

DOCTOR (*rises from chair down* R.C.—*uneasily*). This is a complete change of ideas since last night. (*Crosses up towards windows* R.) I thought it was Parker he suspected. Poor Ralph ! (*Swinging round to* POIROT.) But you believe he is innocent, don't you ?

POIROT. You want to know the truth ? (*Hand on mantelpiece.*)

DOCTOR. Of course.

POIROT. My friend (*turning to* DOCTOR) everything points to the assumption that he is guilty.

DOCTOR. What ! Ralph !

POIROT (*at fireplace*). Yes ! This stupid man—il est bête comme une vache; he has everything pointing his way. Motive—opportunity—means. They all lead to Captain Paton. (*With much*

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determination. Rings bell.) But I will leave no stone unturned. I promised Mees Flora; and she was very sure, that leetle one—very sure indeed! (*Moves to* C. *then up into study.*) Now the blue letter you told me of—(*comes back* C. *between the double doors*)—except for that everything was in its place in the study.

DOCTOR (*following up and looking into study*). Yes, I think so.

(*Enter* PARKER *up* R.)

PARKER. You rang, sir?

POIROT (*goes back to fireplace.* DOCTOR *to stool,* L.C., *sits*). Oh, Parker, go into the study and look around you. Is the room exactly as it was when you entered it last night with Doctor Sheppard and found your master dead?

PARKER (*goes into study*). The curtains were drawn and the electric lights were on, sir.

POIROT. Yes! Yes! Anything else?

PARKER (*indicating grandfather chair*). That chair was drawn out in front of the desk.

POIROT. Show me!

(PARKER *draws out chair* 2 *or* 3 *feet, places it front of desk on* R. *side, turning it round so that the seat faces the door.*)

PARKER. Like that, sir. (*Comes out of study and stands* R. *of double doors.*)

POIROT. You are sure?

PARKER. Yes, sir.

POIROT (*thoughtfully*). Just like that?

PARKER. Yes, sir.

POIROT (*shaking his head and as though speaking to himself. The* DOCTOR *sits again*). Voila ce qui est curieux! (*Slight pause.*) No one would want to sit in such a position. (*To* DOCTOR.) When you left Sir Ackroyd last night, was it in that position?

DOCTOR (*rises, goes up* L. *of* D. *doors*). Oh, no, I'm sure it wasn't.

(POIROT *goes into study, sits on chair, rises, moves it, comes out, takes a level of it with his hand, then sits on chair* R.C. RAYMOND *enters from up* R.)

RAYMOND. Good morning.

(DOCTOR *moves to fireplace from* L. *of study.* RAYMOND *up* L.C.)

POIROT (*rising and going up* C., *by* R.). Bon jour, Monsieur Raymond, last night that chair was so—(*pulls chair out*) when Sir Ackroyd was killed. Some one moved it back again into place. Did you notice it?

RAYMOND (L. *of double doors*). No, indeed I didn't! I don't even remember that it was in that position.

POIROT. It is of no consequence whatever. What I wanted to know is this. Did any stranger come to see Sir Ackroyd during the past week?

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RAYMOND (*thinks for a moment*). During the past week? No. I can't remember anyone. Can you, Parker?

PARKER. There was the young man who came last Monday, sir. From Curtis and Trout I understood he was.

POIROT. Can you describe him?

PARKER. He was fair-haired, sir, and short. Neatly dressed in a blue serge suit. A very presentable young man, sir, for his station in life.

RAYMOND (*laughs*). Oh, yes! I remember; but that is not the kind of stranger Monsieur Poirot means. (*To* POIROT.) Sir Roger had some idea of purchasing a dictaphone. Thought it would help him to get through a lot more work in a limited time. The firm sent down a representative, but nothing came of it.

POIROT (*nodding his head*). Then there's nothing in that. Thank you, Parker.

PARKER (*to* RAYMOND). Excuse me, sir! Mr. Hammond has just arrived—and he would like a word with you.

RAYMOND. I'll come at once.

(*Hurries out up* R., *followed by* PARKER.)

POIROT (*to* DOCTOR). Mr. Hammond?

DOCTOR (*at fire*). The family solicitor.

POIROT. It is a busy time for the young Mr. Raymond. Has he been here long? (*Sits on settee.*)

DOCTOR. Just on two years.

POIROT. He has the air efficient—that one.

DOCTOR. I believe Sir Roger considered him a most able secretary.

(*Enter* FLORA *from French window* R., *followed by* BLUNT.)

FLORA. Oh, there you are, Monsieur Poirot!

POIROT (*rises*). Ah, Mees Flora. (*Shakes hands.*)

FLORA. I came to find you. (*Excitedly.*) Inspector Davies and Colonel Melrose were here *very* early, and questioning me.

POIROT. Yes, yes, I know. Courage. Do not torment yourself, Mees Flora. Madame, your mother, could I see her now?

FLORA. Oh yes. She's with the lawyer. I will tell her.

(*Exits up* R.)

POIROT (*to* BLUNT). Major Blunt, did you move that chair back against the wall last night after the body was discovered?

BLUNT. Chair? No, I never touched it. Why should I?

(POIROT *closes study doors, then turns to* BLUNT, *takes a bit of cambric from his pocket, and shows it to* BLUNT.)

POIROT. Monsieur le Major, what do you make of that?

BLUNT. I don't know! Where did you get it?

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Poirot. I found it caught on a broken piece of wicker, on one of the chairs in the summer-house.

Doctor. Scrap of torn handkerchief, *I* think.

Blunt. Very likely.

(Poirot *puts it back in his pocket.*)

Poirot. A good laundry does not starch the handkerchief. (*To* Doctor.) See, my friend, I will tell you something. There is one person in this house whose alibi has no kind of confirmation—Ursula Bourne.

Doctor. But . . .

Poirot (*holding up his hand*). She said last night she went to the post at nine-thirty. But *if* she went to meet somebody instead: what could be a more convenient place than the leetle summer-house? The scrap of cambric I found—it is obvious.

Blunt. What the devil's he driving at?

Doctor. I don't know, he bewilders me.

Poirot. To me it grows clearer. (*Goes up* C.)

(Blunt *crosses over to fire.* Doctor L.C.)

(Mrs. Ackroyd *enters, followed by* Mr. Hammond, Flora *and* Raymond.)

Mrs. Ackroyd. Ah! dear Doctor Sheppard! (*Turns to* Hammond.) Mr. Hammond—a very close friend of poor Roger's. (*They nod to each other.*) And—let me see—— (*Looking at* Poirot *in perplexity.*)

Flora (*coming forward*). Monsieur Poirot, Mother.

Mrs. Ackroyd. Oh, yes, Monsieur Poirot. (*They bow slightly.*) Of course, my dear, of course. He is to find Ralph, is he not? (*Sits chair* L. *of table* R.)

Flora. He is to find the murderer!

(Doctor *sits on settee.*)

(Hammond *crosses to window and stands looking out.*)

Poirot (C.—*deferentially*). Madame, what time was it when you went to bed last night?

Mrs. Ackroyd (*hesitates*). I—I—really, I can't remember.

Poirot. Yes, yes! But it was *before* Mees Flora?

Mrs. Ackroyd (*indignantly*). Certainly it was. I left my daughter in the hall, reading. I was tired, so I went to bed.

Poirot. Was it before half-past nine?

Mrs. Ackroyd (*hesitates*). I—I'm afraid I . . .

Flora (*interrupting*). It was twenty past nine, Mother. I looked at the time by the clock and mentioned it.

Mrs. Ackroyd (*brightly*). Oh, yes, dear! I remember now—

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most distinctly. I was so bored. I decided to go to bed. (*Brightly.*) Yes—it was *exactly* twenty past nine.

Poirot. When you left here, were the windows open or shut?

(Mr. Hammond *turns and listens to the cross-questioning.*)

Mrs. Ackroyd (*impatiently*). I've no idea. I never went near the windows!

Flora. Oh, yes, you did, Mother! Because you told me you looked out and saw——

(Mrs. Ackroyd *looks at* Flora *and shakes her head for an instant.*)

Major Blunt!

Blunt. What?

Mrs. Ackroyd (*smiling at* Blunt). Yes, yes! (*To* Flora.) Quite right, my dear. (*To* Poirot.) I just looked out to see what Major Blunt was looking at in the dark.

Poirot. Did you *open* the windows?

Mrs. Ackroyd (*annoyed*). Really, Monsieur Poirot, I can't remember.

Poirot. Did you *close* the windows when you left the room to go to bed?

Mrs. Ackroyd (*with dignity*). *That* I'm *quite* sure I didn't do. Parker, the butler, has to attend to these things when he locks up the house for the night.

Poirot (*turning to the* Doctor). The dagger was in the book on the mantelpiece I think you said, Monsieur le Docteur?

Doctor. Yes.

Poirot (*to* Mrs. Ackroyd). Madame, was the dagger in the book when you were here?

Mrs. Ackroyd. I don't know—it—it may have been—I—I didn't notice.

Poirot. But you were reading the book. (*Turns away* L.C.)

Mrs. Ackroyd. Was I?

(Mrs. Ackroyd *is seated in chair* R.C. Flora *and* Raymond *are near her.*)

Poirot (*to* Hammond). Monsieur Hammond.

Hammond. Yes? (Hammond *turns and comes below table, circular move to above table* C.)

Poirot (*to* Hammond). As Sir Ackroyd's lawyer, I take it you are acquainted with the provisions of his will.

Hammond. Certainly. That is my principal business here to-day.

Poirot. Then, as I am acting for Mees Flora, you will not object to telling me the terms of that will?

Hammond. They are quite simple. Shorn of their legal phraseology, and after certain legacies and bequests——

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Poirot (*stopping him suddenly*). Such as——?

Hammond. Various small sums to each servant in his employ—five hundred pounds to Mr. Geoffrey Raymond—then to certain hospitals——

Poirot. The charitable bequests—they do not interest me.

Hammond. Quite so. The income on ten thousand pounds' worth of shares to Mrs. Ackroyd during her lifetime. Twenty thousand pounds outright to Miss Flora Ackroyd. The residue, including this property, and the shares in Ackroyd and Son, to his stepson, Ralph Paton.

Poirot. Sir Ackroyd possessed a large fortune?

Hammond. Very large. Captain Paton will be an exceedingly wealthy young man.

(*They all look at* Poirot—*he goes to fire.*)

(*Turns away and crosses to* Mrs. Ackroyd). Now, as to the question of money, Mrs. Ackroyd. Have you all you need at present? I mean, ready money. Cash you know. If not, I can arrange to let you have whatever you require.

Raymond. That ought to be all right, I cashed a cheque for a hundred pounds yesterday——

Hammond (*to* Poirot). Was there any money found on the body?

Poirot. No.

Hammond. Where is this money? In his desk?

Raymond. No! He always kept it in a drawer in his dressing-table. I put it there myself last night.

Hammond. I think before I leave we ought to make quite sure that Sir Roger did not pay that money away—last night.

Poirot. Monsieur Raymond, will you get it, please?

Raymond. Oh, certainly. (*Exits up staircase* L.)

Poirot. A curious thing to keep money like that in an unlocked drawer.

Mrs. Ackroyd (*with dignity*). Sir Roger had perfect faith in all his servants.

Hammond (*hastily*). Oh! Quite so, quite so! (*Goes up* C.)

(Hammond *up at study doors* C.)

Raymond (*comes down stairs up* L. *to* L.C). Mr. Hammond, there's no money there at all.

Hammond. Either he paid out that hundred pounds some time after dinner last night, or else it has been stolen. (*To* Mrs. Ackroyd.) Which of the servants would go to that room last night?

Mrs. Ackroyd. The housemaid——

Hammond. Has anything been missed before?

Mrs. Ackroyd. No.

Hammond. Are any of the servants leaving?

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MRS. ACKROYD. Yes, Bourne—the parlourmaid—is.

POIROT. You permit? (*To* MRS. ACKROYD, *who nods, he crosses and rings bell, comes back to position and asks quickly.*) When?

MRS. ACKROYD. Sir Roger dismissed her yesterday.

POIROT. Why?

MRS. ACKROYD. I'm sure I don't know. You'd better ask her yourself——

(PARKER *enters up* R.)

PARKER. You rang, Madame?

POIROT (*with apologies to* MRS. ACKROYD). Pardon, Madame. (*Then to* PARKER.) Ask the parlourmaid to come here, please.

(*Exit* PARKER *up* R.)

HAMMOND. Of course, Sir Roger may have paid that money away himself—it may have a bearing on the crime. (*Crosses and goes to windows* R.)

(URSULA BOURNE *enters up* R. *and comes* R.C.)

BOURNE (*quietly*). You sent for me, sir?

POIROT (*to* RAYMOND *as he crosses him to* C.). Pardon, Monsieur.

(RAYMOND *drops down to fireplace.*)

I understand you are leaving, Mademoiselle?

BOURNE. Yes, sir.

POIROT. Why is that?

BOURNE. I disarranged some papers on Sir Roger's desk. He was very angry about it, and said I'd better leave. He told me to go as soon as possible.

POIROT. Were you in Sir Ackroyd's bedroom at all last night?

BOURNE. Yes, sir.

POIROT. Is that your work?

BOURNE. No, sir! But it was the head housemaid's "night out" and the second housemaid wasn't very well, so I offered to make up the bedrooms for her. Miss Flora saw me coming down from Sir Roger's bedroom.

POIROT. Why did you not tell me that, Mees Flora?

FLORA. In the circumstances I—I didn't like to speak about it . . .

POIROT (*to* BOURNE). I must tell you that a large sum of money is missing from Sir Ackroyd's bedroom.

BOURNE. What! I know nothing about any money. (*Roused.*) If you think I took it, and that is why Sir Roger dismissed me, you are very much mistaken.

(*Slight pause.*)

POIROT. It was yesterday that Sir Ackroyd dismissed you—or you dismissed yourself, was it not?

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BOURNE (*nodding*). Yes.

POIROT. How long did the interview last?

BOURNE. The interview?

POIROT. Yes—between you and Sir Ackroyd in the study here?

BOURNE. I—I don't know.

POIROT. Twenty minutes? Half an hour?

BOURNE. Something like that.

POIROT. Not longer?

BOURNE. Not longer than half an hour.

POIROT (*a slight pause, then suddenly*). Thank you, Mademoiselle. *With a wave of his hand.*) That will do.

(BOURNE *exits up* R.)

(*To* HAMMOND.) Monsieur Hammond, what do you think of that girl?

HAMMOND. I don't know—she's got an odd sort of manner.

POIROT (*to* HAMMOND). What do you think of her story?

HAMMOND. What story?

POIROT. The story of her dismissal. Does it take half an hour to dismiss a servant? Was the story of the moving of these papers a likely one? (*Goes up* C.)

HAMMOND (*to* MRS. ACKROYD, *coming above to* C.). Now, Mrs. Ackroyd, I will see that a further sum is sent up to you during the day. You will excuse me now if I hurry away. (*Holding out his hand to her.*)

MRS. ACKROYD (*rising quickly*). Oh, but you will stay and lunch with us, won't you, Mr. Hammond?

HAMMOND. Thank you, I'm afraid I can't. There are so many things incidental with Sir Roger's sudden death that demand my immediate attention. (*Shakes hands and turns to* FLORA.) Good morning, Miss Flora. (*To* RAYMOND *and* BLUNT.) Good morning. (*With a nod to* POIROT *and* DOCTOR.) Good morning.

(*Exits up* R.)

MRS. ACKROYD. Well, dear, I think I'll . . .

(*As the others make a movement,* POIROT *stops them imperatively.*)

POIROT. Pardon, Messieurs et Mesdames! *If* you *please!*

(*By his action he shows he wishes them to remain.* MRS. ACKROYD *sits again. They all stop abruptly—appear startled and nervous.*)

First, I make a special plea to Mademoiselle.

FLORA (*nervously*). To me?

POIROT (*moves a step down*). Where is your fiancé, Mees Flora?

FLORA. I don't know! He's been living in London for the past six months.

POIROT. Captain Paton arrived in this village yesterday.

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Mrs. Ackroyd. What, Ralph?

(Flora *rises.*)

Poirot. He was seen in the woods in the afternoon, and—*last night,* towards half-past nine he was seen walking up the path which leads past the summer-house. What did he come for, Madame? A secret rendezvous?

Flora. If he had a rendezvous, it was not with me.

Poirot. Not with his fiancée? Do you not think that is strange?

Flora. Ralph is in the habit of doing strange things—that's the explanation of it.

Poirot. An explanation which explains nothing. (*Gently.*) Mees Flora, *you* put the case into my hands, but you do not trust me!

Flora (*hotly*). I have not seen Captain Paton in King's Abbot for several months.

(*There is a slight pause.*)

Poirot (*quietly, but with point*). Captain Paton was staying at the White Horse—he left there at nine o'clock last night, and has not returned since. His luggage is *still* at the White Horse.

(*There is a tense silence.*)

Mademoiselle, you are engaged to Captain Paton. If anyone is in his confidence you are. I beg of you—most earnestly, if you know where he is, to persuade him to come forward.

(Flora *raises her head to speak.*)

Flora. Monsieur Poirot . . .

Poirot. One moment—say nothing till you have reflected. His position grows daily more dangerous. If he had come forward at once—no matter how suspicious the facts, he might have had a chance of explaining them away. But this silence—this flight—what can it mean? Mademoiselle, if you really believe in his innocence, persuade him to come forward before it is too late!

Flora (*in low frightened tones*). Too late!

Poirot (*very gently*). See now, Mademoiselle, it is Poirot who asks you—Poirot who has much knowledge, and much experience. I would not seek to entrap you, Mademoiselle. Will you not trust me—and tell me where Captain Paton is hiding?

Flora (*facing* Poirot). Monsieur Poirot, I swear to you—swear solemnly—I have no idea where Ralph is, and that I have neither seen nor heard from him either yesterday or since.

(*She moves down* r. *and* Poirot *gazes at her in silence for a moment.*)

Poirot. Bien! That is that! Now I appeal to these others.

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Madame Ackroyd, Monsieur le Major Blunt, Docteur Sheppard and Monsieur Raymond. If you know where Captain Paton is hiding, speak out!

(*They are all silent.*)

I beg of you.

(*Pause.*)

MRS. ACKROYD (*in injured tones*). I must say Ralph's absence is rather remarkable.

(POIROT *goes up* C.)

FLORA. Mother! *You* don't think Ralph——!

(RAYMOND *shows his anger at this by turning rapidly away with a sharp exclamation—the others also show annoyance.*)

MRS. ACKROYD. One must be thankful your engagement was never announced formally.

FLORA. It will be to-morrow!

MRS. ACKROYD (*aghast*). Flora!

FLORA (*to* RAYMOND). Geoffrey, will you send the announcement to the papers?

BLUNT. What's that?

RAYMOND. If you are sure it is wise, Flora.

FLORA (*turning to* BLUNT *impulsively*). You understand, Major Blunt? As things are, I must stand by Ralph. (*She looks searchingly at* BLUNT.)

(*He nods his head.*)

How could I be disloyal to him now?

BLUNT. She's quite right. I think she's doing the right thing. I'll stand by her!

FLORA. Thank you, Major Blunt.

POIROT (C.). Mademoiselle, I congratulate you on your loyalty and your courage. Will you not misunderstand me if I ask you to postpone the announcement for at least a few days more?

(FLORA *hesitates.*)

I ask it in Captain Paton's interest as much as yours. You frown—you do not see how that can be. But I assure you that it is so. You put the case into my hands—you must not hamper me now.

(*Slight pause.*)

FLORA (*quietly*). I don't like it; but I will do what you say.

POIROT. And now, messieurs et mesdames—understand this—I *mean* to arrive at the truth. I tell you—I *mean* to know. And I shall know, in spite of you all.

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RAYMOND (*quizzically*). How do you mean—"in spite of us all"?

POIROT. Just that, monsieur. Every one of you in this room is concealing something from me.

(*There is a murmur of protest from all of them*—POIROT *raises his hand.*)

Yes, yes! I know what I am saying. *Each one of you has something to hide.* Come now, am I right? (*He looks round.*)

(*There is a short silence.*)

I appeal to you all, once more—tell me the truth—the whole truth! (*Comes down* C. *then turns.*)

(*Another silence.*)

Will no one speak? (*He is* R.C. *up stage. Looks all round, gives a short laugh.*) I am answered! But remember—I *mean* to *know*! (*Turns on his heel and exits up* R.)

CURTAIN.

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ACT III

Scene 1.—HERCULE POIROT'S *Study. Perfectly plain washed plaster walls with dark oak beams at the angles. Two feet from the ceiling above cross beams of oak are the red bricks throwing up the ceiling with its heavy oak beams across.*

There are bookcases on three sides of the room. In the R. *wall are French windows leading out into the garden. A conservatory is* C. *in the back wall with curtains to cover door of same. A Gothic door is up* L.

(*See picture of scene.*)

(*At rise of* CURTAIN POIROT *is seated at top of table* C. *reading "The Times." On table in front of him is a tray on which is coffee and milk, sugar, and the remains of a roll. A serviette is tucked under his chin.* MARGOT *is standing* L. *of him, watching him.*)

MARGOT. Vous avez finis ?
POIROT. Speak English, Margot.
MARGOT. You 'ave finish ?
POIROT. Rotten.
MARGOT. Zut ! alors—You have finished ?
POIROT. Donnez moi une demi tasse.
MARGOT (*pours out coffee*). Prenez donc la tasse entiere.
POIROT. Non—non.
MARGOT. C'est pas ça qui vous fera du mal ?

(POIROT *protests.*)

Si, si, allez—prenez—la——

(POIROT *puts several lumps of sugar in the cup.*)

Non—non—assez, voyons, ça va vous engraisser——

(*A rose is thrown in through the window* R. POIROT *pushes back his chair, rises and picks it up, and sees* CARYL *at the window.*)

POIROT. Ah, Mees Caryl !
CARYL (*enters—crosses* R.C.). Now, what about your begonias ?
POIROT. Wait a minute. (*Goes into conservatory and gets a flower which is in a specimen glass, he brings it to* CARYL.) What do you think of this ? (*Holding it up at arm's length.*)
CARYL. Oh, you prefer that !

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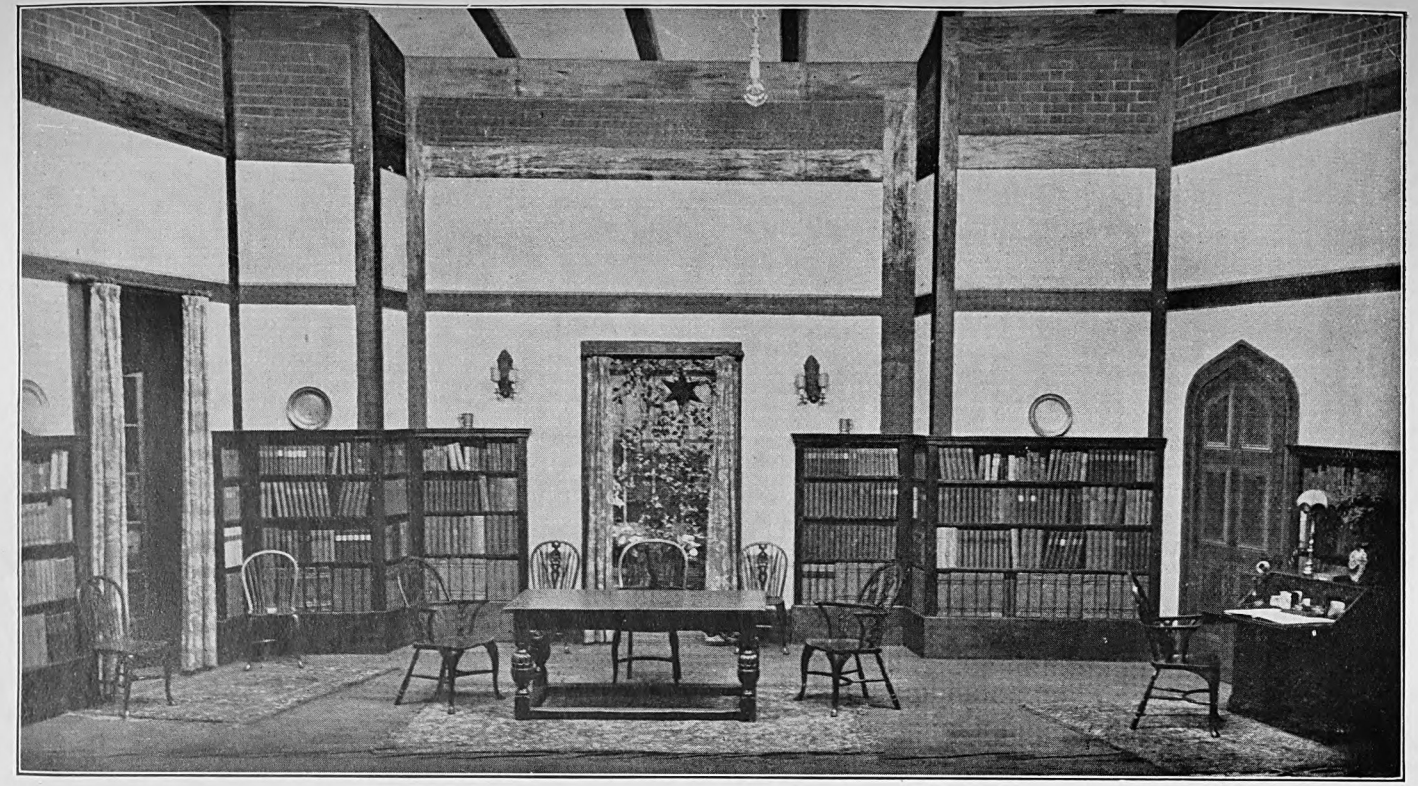

ACT III

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POIROT. No, no, no! (*Throws away the flower he has brought down and puts the rose in the specimen glass.*) I prefer what *you* give me. (*Turns to* MARGOT, *who is noisily removing tray.*) Shut up, Margot, shut up! (*Puts glass with rose on centre of table.*)

CARYL. I came over because James wants to know if there are any new developments. Do you think you will find the murderer?

(POIROT *nods.*)

Margot is sure you will, aren't you, Margot?

(MARGOT *up* L., *nods.* POIROT *with a smile waves her away.*)

(*Knock heard off* L.)

(MARGOT *crosses to door* L. POIROT *pushes her out.*)

POIROT. Qui est la? (*Kisses* CARYL'S *hand.*)

DOCTOR (*enters* R., *and seeing this business, laughs. To* CARYL). Hallo, darling—beware of these Frenchmen.

CARYL. Don't be absurd, James.

POIROT. Monsieur le Docteur is right—(*holding up finger at her*) Beware!

(MARGOT *enters* L. INSPECTOR *follows.*)

MARGOT (*to* POIROT). Monsieur, le police. (*Turns to* INSPECTOR.) Monsieur is there. (*Exits* L.)

POIROT. Ah, Monsieur l'Inspecteur!

INSPECTOR. Morning, Monsieur Poirot. Morning, doctor. Good morning, Miss Sheppard. (*Puts cap on bureau* L.)

(CARYL *starts to go.*)

POIROT (*to* CARYL). No, no, no—you stay.

(*He pulls chair out and* CARYL *sits chair* C., *above table.*)

Sit down (*turning to* INSPECTOR), my friend, sit down.

(INSPECTOR *sits* L. POIROT *continues standing.*)

I am glad to welcome you back from Liverpool. (*Rubbing his hands together as though in anticipation of something pleasant.*) I hope you have good news to tell.

INSPECTOR (*cutting short the word*). No. (*Despondently.*) I've had no luck.

POIROT. Oh, that is bad!

INSPECTOR. But we've sent a description of Captain Paton to every port and railway station in England—his rooms in London and any houses he's been in the habit of frequenting are being watched. The police everywhere are on the look-out. He's no luggage, and no money as far as we know. We *ought* to get him.

POIROT. Yes, yes.

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INSPECTOR. I suppose you've got no line on him yet, Monsieur Poirot?

POIROT (*thoughtfully, as though weighing carefully each word*). I would not go so far as to say that—I have my leetle idea; but no, not yet does it make the sense to tell. The pieces—they do not quite fit the puzzle.

INSPECTOR. You were quite right about those finger-prints. They were Sir Roger's own.

CARYL. There you are, James! Monsieur Poirot, how marvellous you are!

(POIROT *sits in chair* R. *of table.*)

DOCTOR. Extraordinary! (*Sitting in chair down* R. *below window, which he has drawn away from the wall.*)

INSPECTOR. The whole thing's a muddle, that's what it is.

POIROT (*brightly*). Voyez-vous—I will show you a piece of my puzzle. (*Rises, goes above to bureau* L., *gets document, returns.*) Listen. (*Sits and reads.*) "The police have, for some days, been seeking Captain Ralph Paton—the stepson of Sir Roger Ackroyd of Fernly Park, whose death occurred under such tragic circumstances last Friday. Captain Paton has been arrested at Liverpool, where he was on the point of embarking for America."

DOCTOR. What?

CARYL. Oh!

INSPECTOR (*stares at him dumbfounded*). Eh!

DOCTOR (*quickly*). But he's not at Liverpool!

POIROT. Oh, you have the intelligence quick. No, he is not at Liverpool.

INSPECTOR (*in amazed tones*). But haven't I just told you——

POIROT. Mais oui, mais oui! I heard. I am not deaf, thank the good God, nor stupid, thank my good mother! But see, you approach the matter from the wrong—er—starting-point.

INSPECTOR. I don't see how you make that out.

(DOCTOR *is looking in amazement at* POIROT. INSPECTOR *points to paper in* POIROT'S *hand.*)

This thing isn't true!

POIROT. You and I, Monsieur l'Inspecteur, and the good doctor and Mees Caryl, our charming lady colleague, we alone know that—the Press know nothing.

DOCTOR (*surprised*). You want Inspector Davies to send that to the newspapers?

POIROT (*emphatically*). I do.

INSPECTOR. I can't take the responsibility of doing a thing like that.

POIROT. Ah no! The responsibility—that is mine. Not for a moment shall you be responsible. I give you my word.

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INSPECTOR (*appears to hesitate*). It beats me what you expect to get out of this.

POIROT (*very seriously and emphatically*). My friend, I assure you —most solemnly, that very interesting results will follow the appearance of that paragraph in the newspapers to-morrow morning.

INSPECTOR (*unwilling*). Well, I don't like it, but I'll do it. (*Rising and speaking abruptly.*) But mind you, you've got to take *all* responsibility.

POIROT. You have my word—I can say no more.

INSPECTOR (*putting paper in his pocket*). You want it in the local papers as well? (*The* DOCTOR *rises and comes towards table* C.)

POIROT. *Certainement!* Oh yes!

INSPECTOR (*picks up cap from bureau, goes to door*). Right! (*With a short laugh.*) Might as well be hanged for a lamb as a sheep, as they say. Good day. (*Exits door* L.)

(POIROT *crosses up and calls after him.*)

POIROT. Monsieur l'Inspecteur, do not fear! It is good what you do.

DOCTOR (*is now sitting* R. *of table.* POIROT *comes to* L. *of table*). I suppose I must be very stupid, but I confess I can't see this move of yours at all.

POIROT. You should employ you leetle grey cells. (*Surprised.*) Surely it is obvious?

DOCTOR (*annoyed*). According to you everything is "obvious." But you leave me walking about in a fog.

POIROT. My friend, of facts I keep nothing to myself; but—to every one his own interpretation of them.

DOCTOR. Well, as far as I can see, we can only be certain of one thing, that Sir Roger was dead at a quarter past ten and alive at a quarter to ten. I suppose you'll admit that?

POIROT. I admit nothing that is not *proved.*

DOCTOR. But we *have* got proof of that. We've got Flora Ackroyd's evidence.

POIROT. That she said good night to her uncle? But me, I do not always believe what a young lady tells me—no (*shaking his head*), not even when she is charming and beautiful.

CARYL (*rises*). Well, I'm not going to listen to a word against Flora. If you two men have nothing better to do but talk scandal—I must attend to my housekeeping. (*Goes to window* R.)

POIROT (*rises—goes to window*). Oh, Mees Caryl, forgive. (*Kisses her hand.*)

(CARYL *goes off* R.)

(POIROT *stands at window waving and kissing his hand.*)

DOCTOR. When you've quite done making weird signs to my sister.

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(Poirot, *all smiles, very pleased with himself, returns to* C.)

We were talking about Miss Ackroyd, Poirot, when you were so far away.

(Poirot *returns to* C. *above table and is still smiling.*)

Parker saw her coming out of the study door.

Poirot (*with a complete change of tone, his voice rings out sharply*). No! That is just what he did not see. I satisfied myself of that by my leetle experiment on the night of the murder. You can wait?

Doctor (*impatiently*). Yes, yes! I've got nothing special.

Poirot (*crosses to telephone on bureau*). Good! (*Sits. Takes up receiver.*) Hallo! Three-four King's Abbot, please. (*In a louder tone.*) Three-four, King's Abbot, please. (*To* Doctor.) It was charming the way Mees Caryl defended Mees Flora. C'est charmant. Does she cook well?

Doctor. Abominably.

Poirot (*slight pause*). Hallo! Hallo! Is that Fernly Park? Is that you, Parker? Monsieur Poirot speaking. Has Mees Flora left? Five minutes ago. Thank you. (*Puts up receiver and turns to* Doctor.) I had already sent for Mees Flora. She will be here in a minute.

Doctor. Flora is coming here?

Poirot. Immediately. My friend, have you ever reflected that many people in that house stood to benefit by Sir Ackroyd's death? Madame Ackroyd, Mees Flora, young Mr. Raymond——

Doctor (*incredulously*). But you don't think that Raymond for a paltry five hundred——

Poirot. Many crimes have been committed for less. There is only one person in fact in that house does not benefit—Major Blunt.

Doctor. You think Blunt's got something to conceal, too?

Poirot. As for that, there is a saying, is there not, that Englishmen conceal only one thing—their love. And Major Blunt, I should say, is not good at concealments.

(*Knock off* L. *Pause.* Doctor *about to speak.*)

(*Sharply.*) Phist! (*Pointing to door* L.) Mees Flora!

Doctor. I think I'd better be going. (*Rises and goes* R.)

Poirot. No, no, no!

(*A slight pause. Door* L. *opens and* Margot *enters.*)

Margot (*to* Poirot). Monsieur and Madame are here. (*Turns to* Flora.) Monsieur is there.

(*Shows in* Flora *and* Major Blunt.)

(*Exit* Margot.)

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POIROT. Good morning, Mees Flora. (*Kisses her hand.*)

FLORA. Good morning, Monsieur Poirot. Good morning, Doctor.

(DOCTOR *murmurs* "Good morning" *and* BLUNT *also nods a quick* "Good morning" *simultaneously.* FLORA *looks nervous.*)

POIROT. Can we have a word with you alone, Mees Flora?

(BLUNT *moves towards door.*)

FLORA (*nervously*). What is it? (*To* BLUNT.) Don't go, Major Blunt. (*To* POIROT.) He can stay, can't he?

POIROT (*with a shrug of his shoulders*). That is as you wish, Mees Flora. There is a question it is my duty to put to you; I should prefer to do so privately, and I think that you would prefer it also.

BLUNT. Flora, perhaps I——

FLORA (*gives* POIROT *a keen look, and her face whitens—to* BLUNT). I want you to stay—please.

(BLUNT *appears to hesitate.*)

BLUNT. Yes, but he says I——

FLORA. Yes, but I mean it. Whatever it is, I'd rather you heard it.

(BLUNT *moves down a step.* FLORA'S *gaze shifts from the* DOCTOR *to* POIROT. FLORA *is standing by chair* L. *of table.* POIROT *is above the table* C.)

POIROT (*nodding back at her—slight pause*). Mademoiselle, the other day when we were all together, I implored you to be frank with me. It was that, was it not? I suggest that you were not in the study on Friday night—that you never said good night to your uncle, and that you were on the stairs leading from your uncle's bedroom when you heard Parker coming. (*Gently.*) See, I will make it easy for you. You took the money, did you not?

BLUNT (*sharply*). You took the money? (*Taking a step towards her.*)

FLORA (*to* POIROT). Yes. (*Drooping her head.*) You are right. I took that money. I stole it. I'm a common thief.

BLUNT. Good God!

FLORA (*to* BLUNT). Now you know! I'm glad it's come out—it's been a nightmare to me. (*Bursts into tears and sinks into chair* L. *of table.*)

(BLUNT *says* "Flora.")

(*Buries her face in her hands on table.*) You don't know what my life has been since mother and I came to live with Uncle Roger. Wanting things—scheming for them—lying and cheating—running up bills—promising to pay. Oh, I hate myself when I think of it

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all! That's what brought Ralph and me together—money! Want of money! We were both weak! I understood him and was sorry. We're weak, despicable things. (*Looks at* Blunt *and suddenly stamps her foot.*) Why do you look at me like that—as though you didn't believe me? I may be a thief, but at any rate I'm real now. I'm not pretending to be the kind of girl you like—young and innocent and simple. I hate myself, I despise myself—but you've got to believe one thing: if it would have made things better for Ralph, I would have told the truth at once. But I saw it would only make the case against him worse than ever. I wasn't doing him any harm by sticking to my lie!

Blunt. Ralph! It's always Ralph!

Flora (*hopelessly*). You don't understand, and never will. (*To* Poirot.) Monsieur Poirot, I tried to put the money back that night afterwards, but I couldn't get into the hall—the door was locked.

Poirot. I know—I locked it. (*No one has moved, all hold this situation.*)

Flora (*to* Poirot). I never saw my uncle that night in the study. As for the money, you can take whatever steps you please. Nothing could be worse than it is now! (*Suddenly breaks down. then rises, coming just below* L. *corner of the table. The* Doctor *comes to her and says,* "Flora my dear." Doctor *puts his* R. *arm round her and takes her through window* R. *into the garden.*)

Blunt (*goes above table to* R.C. *Turns*). Monsieur Poirot, Miss Ackroyd never touched a penny of that money—she's lying, with some wild idea of shielding Ralph Paton! The truth is, that money was given to me by Sir Roger for a special purpose, and I am prepared to go into the witness-box and swear to it!

Poirot. Monsieur le Majeur, I am not deceived by your leetle comedy. Mees Flora took the money. All the same, it is well imagined what you say. It is very good what you have done—it pleases me.

Blunt (*coldly*). I am not the least anxious for your opinion. (*Moving away to window.*)

Poirot. No, perhaps not, but—— (*Speaks so pointedly that* Blunt *is bound to listen.*) *I have seen what you are concealing*—you *love* Mees Flora!

(Blunt *stops.*)

Blunt (*comes back—indignantly*). What the devil's it got to do with you? (*Turning away again to* R.)

Poirot (*persisting*). Yes, yes! You try to conceal it from all the world. That is very good. But take the advice of Poirot—do not conceal it from Mees Flora.

(Blunt *has been restless up to now, he has turned and is moving up* C., *but the last words rivet his attention and he stops.*)

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BLUNT. What do you mean by that?

POIROT (*sits* C.). You think she loves Captain Paton—it is not so. She accepted him to please her uncle—and her mother. There was sympathy and understanding between them, but love—no! (*Pointedly.*) It is not Captain Paton Mees Flora loves.

BLUNT. How do you know that? (*Comes to* R. *end of table.*)

POIROT. You are blind, Monsieur, blind! She is loyal, this lovely English girl. Captain Paton is under suspicion, she feels bound in honour to stick to him, but she does not love him.

BLUNT (*stammering*). D-do—do you really think——

POIROT. If you doubt me, Monsieur le Major, ask her yourself. But perhaps you no longer care to—the affair of the money——

BLUNT. Do you think I care a damn for that! Roger was always impossible about money. She got in a mess and didn't dare tell him. Poor kid! Poor lonely kid!

(*Crosses away up left.*)

POIROT (*calling to* DOCTOR *through window*). Monsieur le Docteur, Mees Flora is still in the garden?

DOCTOR (*answering off* R.). Yes. (*Comes slowly in from window and stops below it.*)

POIROT (*to* BLUNT). Then she is alone in the garden?

BLUNT (*taking* POIROT'S *hand*). You're a sound fellow, Monsieur Poirot.

POIROT (*drawing hand away as if in pain*). You are a sound fellow, too.

(*The* DOCTOR *is watching this scene and sniggers.* BLUNT *looks angrily at him, the* DOCTOR *laughs.* BLUNT *crosses* L. *to get his hat, turns and crosses in front of table.*)

BLUNT. I've been every kind of a fool. (*Exits into garden* R.)

POIROT (*softly*). Not every kind of a fool. Only one kind—the fool in love.

DOCTOR (*comes above* R. *of table. With concern*). But this business of Flora Ackroyd and the money alters *everything*! We've got to find out what everybody was doing from nine-thirty—not a quarter to ten! Nine-thirty! That's the time! Those alibis are all worthless now. Absolutely! I don't know whether you realize that, Poirot?

POIROT. I *think* so. Oh yes! You see, I have been familiar with the idea for some time!

DOCTOR (*sits chair* R. *Emphatically*). I know what you're thinking. You're bringing it close and closer to Ralph Paton, but I'll never believe——

(POIROT *tries to speak.*)

And I know what you're going to say—that Ralph Paton inherits a big fortune by his stepfather's death.

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Poirot. That is *one* motive. There are *three*!

Doctor. Three!

Poirot. There was trouble about his engagement to Flora—that is *two*. And blackmail—*three*. Supposing Ralph Paton to have been the man who blackmailed Mrs. Ferrars. Remember he was extravagant—and it was never easy for him to get the money he wished from Sir Ackroyd.

Doctor. What! By Jove! The case does look black against him.

(Caryl *enters suddenly through open windows.* Poirot *shows pleasure.*)

Poirot. Ah, Mees Caryl!

Caryl. Excuse me coming again, Monsieur Poirot. James, you're wanted in the surgery.

(*Exclamation of annoyance from* Doctor.)

Doctor. What is it?

Caryl. That boy from the farm has run something into his hand.

Doctor. Idiots! They're not fit to handle tools of any kind!

(*Exits* r.)

(Caryl *is following the* Doctor *off when* Poirot *calls her back.*)

Poirot. Mees Caryl—

(Caryl *stops at window and looks at* Poirot.)

I want you to help me.

(Caryl *comes down to* r. *end of table and sits on table.* Poirot *comes down* l. *to front of table.*)

Poirot. I have a nephew—he is not quite right (*pointing to his head*) here. Nothing dangerous, but a little simple. So far the family have kept him at home, but they think it will be much better for him to go perhaps to some place where he will be under medical care. Not an asylum. No—I would not put him there. No—I would put him in a nice home for slight mental cases where he could be watched, and taken care of, in the country—not too far away.

Caryl. I know the very place—about ten miles from here—where my brother has sent patients sometimes. The matron's name is Mason—yes—Miss Mason—The Willows—Cranchester.

Poirot (*takes out notebook and writes*). Miss Mason—the Willows—C-r-a-n-c-h-e-s-t-e-r—I will go there to-day. (*Moves a step away to* l.) Mees Caryl, have you a good memory?

Caryl (*still sitting on table. With a laugh*). Oh, I don't know! Yes, I think so. (*Emphatically.*) Much better than my brother, anyway. He often has to ask me things.

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POIROT (*standing nearer to her*). Ah yes! But you are much younger than your brother.

CARYL. Twelve years.

POIROT. But it is a lifetime!

CARYL. Anyway, I don't know what he'd do if I were not here to look after him.

POIROT. That is so! Mees Caryl, I am going to test your memory.

CARYL (*brightly*). Yes?

POIROT. Did anyone from Fernly Park call at your brother's surgery on the day of the murder?

CARYL. Oh no! I'm sure they didn't—they never do.

POIROT. I mean any of the servants.

CARYL. No!

POIROT. Now think carefully—remember, it is five days ago.

CARYL. But I'm certain. From the sitting-room window I can see anyone who goes down the path to the surgery—and it would be an unusual thing for even any of the servants from Fernly Park to come—my brother always goes up there.

POIROT (*surprised*). And you remember all the patients who called that day?

CARYL. Yes, I do! Everything is particularly clear in my mind about that day, for it was the day Mrs. Ferrars was found dead.

POIROT (*softly*). Tell me who the patients were?

CARYL. Oh, just the village people. There was old Mrs. Bennett, and Dolly Grice (*ticking them off on her fingers*)—with Jack Parsons, an American steward——

POIROT. Pardon?

CARYL. An American steward off one of the big liners.

POIROT (*kindly and encouragingly*). An American stranger? What is he doing in this village place?

CARYL. Well, if you must know, he's walking out with Dolly Grice.

POIROT. What is his ship?

CARYL. The "Baltic."

POIROT. The "Baltic." The White Star—it sails from Liverpool. (*Picks up "The Times" from the* C. *table.*) Shipping—shipping—what day was Saturday?

CARYL. Saturday?—the nineteenth.

POIROT. "Baltic—Saturday, 19th—from Liverpool to New York." (*Goes to bureau* L., *gets his hat, comes back to her.*) Excuse me, Miss Caryl, I have much to do. I must send a wireless to a friend of mine in New York. (*Escorts her to window* R.)

(*She exits.*)

(*He calls.*) Margot—Margot!

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(Margot *enters quickly from* L., *leaving the door wide open.*)

Note.—A trick line is used to prevent door from closing: it is essential the door is wide open for the exit of Poirot at the finish of the scene.

Poirot. Je ne dejeune pas a la maison aujourd'hui.

Margot. Comment?

Poirot. Je ne dejeune pas a la maison aujourd'hui.

Margot. Ou allez vous alors?

Poirot. Maison de Sante.

Margot. Comment?

Poirot. To a mad house. (*Jamming his hat down on his head, he dashes straight past* Margot *and off stage* L. *His voice dies away in the distance.*)

Curtain.

Scene 2.—Poirot's *Study.*

Time.—*The next night—after dinner.*

(*At rise of* Curtain, Poirot, *the* Doctor *and* Caryl *are seated at the table.* Poirot C., Doctor R. *and* Caryl L. *On table are three coffee cups, bottle of brandy and three glasses.*)

(Poirot *offers the* Doctor *another drink.*)

Doctor. Thank you, I think I will. I can't refuse this. You didn't get this in King's Abbot.

Margot (*enters* L.). Pardon, Mademoiselle, your cook she come with a lady to see you.

Doctor (*to* Caryl). Who on earth is that?

Caryl. I don't know. What an extraordinary thing! (*Rises.*) I'll be back in a few minutes. Will you excuse me?

(*Exits* L.)

Poirot (*to* Margot). When Parker, the butler from Fernly Park, arrives, let him wait in the kitchen till I ring.

(Margot *nods and exits* L.)

(*To* Doctor.) I forgot—I asked Parker to come here. (*Abruptly.*) Tell me, my friend, you made it quite clear and imperative to Madame Ackroyd that they must all come to my leetle reunion at nine o'clock to-night?

Doctor. I did. I said exactly what you asked me to. Mrs. Ackroyd didn't seem to care about coming without knowing what they were wanted——

Poirot (*interrupting*). Yes, yes! That is why I asked you to take the message for me. I knew if I went myself I should be asked why, and what for. And you know I much dislike to explain my leetle ideas—(*pointedly*) until the time comes.

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DOCTOR. Well, I did my best. Mrs. Ackroyd gave me to understand they would come, but I can't promise you they'll turn up. They are a little afraid of you now.

POIROT (*with satisfaction*). Ah! Fear will bring them.

(*Door* L. *opens and* CARYL *comes into the room.*)

CARYL (*calls*). Come in, Bourne. It's quite all right. You can come in, there's nothing to be afraid of.

(BOURNE *enters* L.)

This is Bourne.

POIROT (*going forward with both hands outstretched—gently*). No, that is not quite right. No, not Bourne, but Ursula Paton, Mrs. Ralph Paton.

DOCTOR *and* CARYL *look at each other in astonishment*—URSULA PATON *drops into chair by* L. *of table* C. *and breaks down.*)

DOCTOR. What!

URSULA (*looking up and drying her eyes, speaks tearfully*). This is very silly of me. (*Tries to rise.*)

POIROT (*kindly*). No, no, please——

(URSULA *sits.*)

We can realize the strain of the last week.

URSULA (*to* POIROT). How *did* you know? (*Tearfully.*) Did Ralph tell you?

POIROT (*brings down chair* C. *and sits*). It is my business to make inquiries—to find out things.

URSULA. You know what brought me to-night? (*Holds out a bit of crumpled newspaper.*) This! in the newspaper. It says Ralph has been arrested at Liverpool.

POIROT (*hands cutting to* DOCTOR—*slight pause*). Well?

(URSULA *hesitates. The* DOCTOR *reads newspaper cutting and* CARYL *holds out her hand for it.*)

(*Gently.*) You do not trust me? Yet you came to find me—why was that?

URSULA. Monsieur Poirot, Ralph never did this ghastly thing. I know you are clever and will find out the truth. And also—— (*She hesitates.*)

POIROT. Yes?

URSULA. I think you are kind.

POIROT (*taking her hand and patting it*). I thank you. But if I am to save him I must know all there is to know. And you must tell me—pourquoi domestique—why are you a parlourmaid?

URSULA. For a living. You see, when my father died it was

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found there was absolutely nothing. I was obliged to earn my own living and I didn't know how to do anything. I met Ralph at Fernly Park, we became engaged, and were secretly married when Sir Roger announced his niece's engagement to Ralph. I was so upset I went to him and told him Ralph and I were married. He was terribly angry and told me to go—he accused me of deliberately entrapping Ralph for the sake of the money I thought he would inherit. I sent Ralph a telegram to come down and asked him to meet me——

Poirot. In the summer-house? (*Emphatically.*) You see, I know—and you tore your apron on one of the wicker chairs.

Ursula (*wearily*). Did I?

Poirot. At what time was that?

Ursula. It was half-past nine when I went to meet him . . .

Poirot. And what time did you leave him? Think carefully!

Ursula. I've gone over it again and again! He was furious with me for having told Sir Roger about our marriage because he said the engagement to Miss Flora had only been so he could gain time and get Sir Roger to pay his debts, and that as soon as he had got something to do, he was going to send for me and tell Sir Roger everything. I was furious and I'm afraid I said some bitter things to him. I didn't stay more than ten minutes with him—I'm certain of that, because it was barely a quarter to ten when I got to my room.

Poirot. Leaving him in the summer-house?

Ursula. Yes. (*Alarmed.*) But, Monsieur Poirot, you don't think——

Poirot. Madame, what I think does not alter facts—how long did you stay in your room?

Ursula. Till ten o'clock.

Poirot. Have you anyone who can prove that?

Ursula. That I was in my room, do you mean? Oh no! (*Rises.*) But surely—(*terror-stricken, she shrinks back*). Oh, I see, they might think that I—that I——

Poirot. That it was you who entered by the window and stabbed Sir Ackroyd?

Ursula (*she turns away to* L., *shuddering*). Horrible! Horrible!

Caryl (*goes to her above table*). Nobody but a fool would think such a thing. (Ursula *comes back and sits* L. *of table.* Caryl *gives her back the newspaper cutting.*) As for that Ralph—I don't think much of him running away like this and leaving you to face things alone.

Ursula. I wish he had come forward at the first, and said openly that he'd had nothing to do with it. I know that he's very fond of you, Doctor—(*looking at* Doctor)—I fancied that perhaps you might have known where he was hiding.

Doctor. I?

Caryl. Why should James have known?

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URSULA (*frantically*). Oh, I don't know! But Ralph has often spoken of your brother, and I know he would be likely to think of him as his best friends in King's Abbot.

DOCTOR. My dear child, I have not the least idea where Ralph is at the present moment.

POIROT (*quietly*). I am quite sure of that.

URSULA (*in amazement, holding out the newspaper cutting—and rising quickly from chair*). But—the paper—it says he has been arrested at Liverpool?

POIROT (*contemptuously*). Ah, that! Of no consequence, madame, nothing at all. The Press must say something.

URSULA (*incredulously*). But then——

POIROT. Now, no questions. You must trust me. This evening I shall want you to attend my leetle reunion—here—at nine o'clock.

URSULA. But I ought to be getting back to Fernly.

CARYL. My dear Mrs. Paton, you can't possible go back to Fernly to-night.

DOCTOR. Of course you can't. Why not come and stay with us, just for to-night, anyway?

POIROT. Ah!

URSULA. I must go.

CARYL. I insist on your coming. (*Kisses her.*) I'll go and get your room ready.

URSULA. How frightfully nice of you!

CARYL (*crosses* R., *turns at window and comes back a step. To* POIROT). May I come back when they've all gone?

POIROT. That will be charming.

(CARYL *goes off through windows* R.)

(*A knock is heard door* L. POIROT *whispers to* URSULA. *She rises,* POIROT *leads her up into conservatory. The* DOCTOR, *who has been sitting* R. *of table, rises also.*)

(*Door* L. *opens.* MARGOT *shows in* MRS. ACKROYD, FLORA, BLUNT, *and* RAYMOND. POIROT *comes down* C.)

(MARGOT *exits.*)

Ah, Madame Ackroyd. (*Indicates chair* L. *of table.*) Mees Flora. (*Indicates chair* R. *of* C. *of table.*) Monsieur le Major. (*Indicates chair up* L. BLUNT *brings chair down.*) Monsieur Raymond. (*Indicates chair by bureau. The* DOCTOR *again sits* R. *of table* C.)

(*They all sit except* POIROT.)

RAYMOND. What's the great idea, Monsieur Poirot? Some scientific machine? Do we have bands round our wrists which register guilty heart-beats?

POIROT. I have read of it—yes—but me, I am old-fashioned. I work only with the little grey cells. (*Tapping his forehead.*) First

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of all I have a little announcement to make. (*Goes up* C. *and brings* URSULA *down.*)

(RAYMOND *and* BLUNT *rise.* POIROT *places his own chair from* C. *to* L. *above table for* URSULA. *Gets another chair for himself. All sit again except* POIROT.)

This lady is Mrs. Ralph Paton. She was married to Captain Paton last March.

(URSULA *looks very embarrassed.*)

FLORA (*to* URSULA—*puts her hand on her arm*). We had no idea of such a thing! You and Ralph kept your secret very well. I am —very glad about it.

URSULA (*sitting* L. *above table*). You are very kind—Ralph behaved very badly—especially to you.

FLORA. You needn't worry about that. I do think he might have trusted me with the secret, though I wouldn't have let him down. (*Leaning forward to* URSULA.) Bourne (*laughs, correcting herself*), I'm so sorry, Mrs. Paton, just tell me one thing. Where is Ralph! You must know if anyone does!

RAYMOND. The papers say he's detained at Liverpool.

POIROT (*shortly*). He is not at Liverpool.

DOCTOR. In fact, no one knows where he is.

RAYMOND (*banteringly*). Except Monsieur Poirot, eh?

POIROT. Me, I know everything! Remember that!

RAYMOND. Everything! (*With a whistle.*) Whew! That's a tall order. (*Incredulously.*) Do you mean to say you can really guess where Ralph is?

POIROT. You can call it guessing, I call it knowing, my friend. Madame Ackroyd, Mees Flora, Major Blunt, Monsieur Raymond——

(*The door* L. *opens and* MARGOT *shows in* PARKER.)

and Parker.

MRS. ACKROYD. What is the meaning of all this?

POIROT. Every one present had an opportunity to kill Sir Ackroyd. I will be as brief as possible, and will only deal with those points which are absolutely necessary. I know from Monsieur le Docteur, and confirmed by Parker, that the Docteur left Sir Ackroyd at ten minutes to nine. I was told by Madame Paton—(*with a quick look at* URSULA)—that she went to the post at nine-thirty—returned to her room at twenty to ten and stayed there till ten o'clock. But there is no confirmation of that. I search the summer-house, and I find a piece of torn apron. Did it belong to Madame Paton? Did she go to meet anybody? If so—who? Then I learn that Captain Paton was seen going up the path towards the summer-house at nine-twenty-five. Eh bien! It also makes one point unexpectedly clear—it could not have been Captain Paton

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who was in the study at nine-thirty talking to Sir Ackroyd, because he was in the summer-house with his wife. Now we come to a most interesting aspect of the crime. Who *was* in the study with Sir Ackroyd at nine-thirty? Then I put to myself a most audacious question: *Was anyone with him?*

RAYMOND (*in mild protest*). I don't know whether you're trying to make me out a liar, Monsieur Poirot, but the matter does not rest on my evidence alone—except as to the exact words heard. Major Blunt also heard Sir Roger talking to someone, and so did Parker, though he couldn't catch the words clearly.

POIROT (*gently*). I have not forgotten. But Major Blunt thought it was *you* Sir Ackroyd was speaking to.

RAYMOND (*turns to* BLUNT). Blunt knows now he was mistaken.

BLUNT. Exactly.

POIROT. Yet there must have been some reason for his thinking so.

BLUNT. Yes, but I——

POIROT. Oh no! (*Holding up his hand.*) I know the reason you will give, but it is not enough. From the beginning of the case I have been struck by one thing—the nature of the words Mr. Raymond overheard. "The calls on my purse have been so frequent of late that I fear it is impossible for me to accede to your request." Does nothing strike you as odd about that?

RAYMOND. I don't think so. He has often dictated letters to me using those very words.

POIROT (*triumphantly*). Exactly! Would anyone use such a phrase when *talking* to another! Impossible that that should be part of a real conversation! Now, if he had been dictating a letter——

BLUNT. Must have been dictating to someone.

POIROT (*softly*). Why? We have no evidence that there was anyone else in the room. No other voice but Sir Ackroyd's was heard, remember.

RAYMOND. Surely, a man wouldn't dictate letters of that type aloud to himself—not unless he was—well, going balmy.

POIROT (*still softly*). You have all forgotten one thing. The stranger who called at the house on the preceding Monday.

(*They all look blankly at* POIROT.)

(*Nodding encouragingly at them.*) But yes—on the *Monday*. The young man was not in himself important. But the firm he represented interested me very much.

RAYMOND (*with a gasp*). The dictaphone company. I see it now! A dictaphone!

POIROT. Precisément! Me, I had the curiosity to inquire of the company. Their reply is that Sir Ackroyd *did* purchase a dicta-

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phone from their representative. Why he concealed the matter from you, I do not know.

Raymond. Must have meant to surprise me with it. He had a childish love of surprising people. All the same, this discovery of yours—brilliant though it is—leaves the essential position unchanged. Sir Roger was alive at nine-thirty since he was speaking into the dictaphone. As for Ralph Paton——

Ursula (*flaring up*). But, Mr. Raymond, Ralph and I parted just before a quarter to ten. He never went near the study, I'm sure of that. When he knew I had told Sir Roger we were married, he was the last person he wanted to see——

Raymond. It isn't that I doubt your story, Mrs. Paton; I've always been quite sure that Captain Paton was innocent. But one has to think of a court of law, and the questions that would be asked. He is in a most unfortunate position, but if he were to come forward——

Poirot (*interrupting*). That is your advice, yes? That he should come forward?

Raymond. Certainly! And *if* you know where he is——

Poirot. I see that you do not believe that I do. And yet I have just told you that I know *everything*! The hiding-place of Ralph Paton——

Blunt (*sharply*). Where is he?

Poirot (*rising—smiling*). Not very far away, Monsieur le Major He is there! (*Goes up to the conservatory, draws curtains apart.*).

(*They all look towards the conservatory.* Ralph *stands there smiling at them. There is a confused babble of exclamations as* Ralph *comes down* c. *smiling across at the* Doctor, *who is standing up, looking utterly amazed.* Poirot *smiles and shakes a reproving finger at the* Doctor.)

Flora (*rises*). Ralph!

Poirot. Have I not said—what you conceal from me I find out? (*To the others.*) I found out the Docteur had gone straight to the White Horse from the scene of the crime to see Captain Paton. He did not find him. But I said to myself—supposing he met him on the road afterwards on the way home. The good Docteur was a friend of the Captain—he knew things looked black against him—perhaps he knew more of the Captain's affairs than we did.

Doctor. As a matter of fact I did. I suppose I might as well make a clean breast of things. When I got to the White Horse and found that Ralph was not there, and had been out since nine o'clock—I was dumbfounded! To my relief I met him on the road afterwards—told him what had happened, and learnt of his marriage to Ursula Bourne. I knew suspicion couldn't fail to attach to him—if not him, then to the girl he loved. I put the facts plainly before

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him. The thought of having to give evidence that might incriminate his wife made him resolve at all costs to—to disappear.

RALPH. You see, I thought that after Ursula left me to go back to the house, she might have tried to get another interview with Sir Roger. He had already been very hard and bitter towards her that afternoon—and I thought he might have so insulted her—that, without realizing what she was doing——

URSULA (*in horrified amazement*). Ralph!

RALPH. I'm so sorry. (*Moves over to* L. *of her.*)

POIROT (*dryly*). Let us return to the culpable conduct of Monsieur le Docteur. He consented to do what he could to help Captain Paton, and was successful in hiding him from the police.

RAYMOND. Where? In his own house?

POIROT. Ah no! You should ask yourself the question that I did. If the good Docteur is concealing the Captain, what place would he choose? It must necessarily be somewhere not too far off. An hotel? No! Lodgings? No! Where then? Ah, I have it—a nursing home. I consult Mees Caryl, and find there is one near Cranchester. I go there, and I find Captain Paton there under another name. I ask him to come to my house—he arrived here early this morning.

RALPH. Doctor Sheppard has been very loyal. He did what he thought was for the best. I see now, I ought to have come forward and faced it. You see, in the home, I knew nothing of what was going on.

POIROT (*dryly*). Monsieur le Docteur has been a model of discretion, but me, I discover all the leetle secrets. It is my business.

RAYMOND. It's very awkward for all of us. I think you ought to say what you really did that night.

RALPH. There's very little for me to add to what you already know. I left the summer-house about a quarter to ten, tramped about the lanes, trying to make up my mind what line to take with my stepfather. I'm bound to admit I haven't the shadow of an alibi—but I give you my solemn word, that I never saw him that night dead or alive, I'd like all of *you* to believe me, whatever anyone else thinks.

RAYMOND (*murmurs*). No alibi? That's bad! I believe you, of course, but it's a bad business.

POIROT (*cheerfully*). It makes things very simple, though—very simple indeed!

(*They all look at him aghast.*)

You see what I mean? . . . No? . . . I will make it clear to you. To save Captain Paton, the real criminal must confess to me before midday to-morrow. (*He beams on them all. There is a slight pause.*) Yes. I mean what I say. See now, I did not invite

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Inspector Davies to be present. That was for a reason. I did not want to tell him all that I know—that is, not yet.

(*There is a slight pause.* POIROT *leans forward and his whole personality seems to change—he appears suddenly dangerous.*)

I know the person who killed Sir Roger Ackroyd is in this room. It is to that person that I speak. After midday to-morrow the truth goes to the police—comprenez ?

(*There is a dead silence.* MARGOT *enters quietly with a telegram on a salver. Shuts door and comes above table* C.)

MARGOT. Dépêche pour Monsieur.

(POIROT *tears it open, glances at it, then turns to* MARGOT.)

POIROT. No answer.

(MARGOT *steps back.*)

BLUNT (*abruptly, in resonant tones*). The person who killed Sir Roger is amongst us, you say. You know who ?

POIROT (*crumpling the telegram with a cruel grip*). *I know now.* (*Sits* C.)

(*Tense silence, during which* POIROT *puts the telegram into his pocket.*)

(*Very softly.*) Messieurs ! Mesdames—this leetle reunion of mine is at an end ! Do not forget what I have said—after midday to-morrow the truth goes to the police. (*He goes up to conservatory, leans against the wall, his back to them, holding by a curtain in each hand. They all move silently towards the door.*)

DOCTOR (*to* RALPH). Ralph, your wife is going to stay with us—will you come along, too ?

RALPH. Oh, thanks ! (*To* POIROT.) Good night.

(DOCTOR, RALPH, *and* URSULA *exit* R. *All others exit* L. *As they exit* POIROT *staggers, clutches the curtains, which come together over conservatory door : he almost collapses against the wall.*)

(*After they have all gone off* POIROT *staggers to chair* L. *of table and collapses.* MARGOT *returns after seeing every one off, rushes to him and tries to revive him.*)

MARGOT. Qu'avez-vous. Mon Dieu vous êtes malade mon pauvre bebe. (*Runs to windows calling.*) Monsieur le Docteur, Vene —vite—vite—Monsieur est malade. Je ne sais pas ce qu'il-y-a.

(DOCTOR *enters* R., *comes to* POIROT.)

DOCTOR. What's the matter ?

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(POIROT *is on the verge of collapse, but recovers himself, rises, indicates the* DOCTOR *is to sit down, pours himself out some brandy and passes the bottle to the* DOCTOR. POIROT *is sitting* L. *of table. Drinks.*)

I shouldn't take too much of that.

(DOCTOR *standing at* L. *top of table, looking at* POIROT, *who smiles and nods his head.*)

(*To* MARGOT.) I think he will be all right now. (*Waves his hand for her to go.*)

(MARGOT *exits* L., *closing door, after looking at* POIROT.)

POIROT. Monsieur le Docteur!

DOCTOR. Feel better now? (*Sits* R. *of table.*)

POIROT. Ah well, mon ami, what are your thoughts?

DOCTOR. I don't know what to think. You seem to be playing a comedy with those people.

POIROT. A comedy? It is not laughing that will keep them awake to-night.

DOCTOR. But what was the point? Why not go straight to the police with the truth, instead of giving the guilty person this elaborate warning?

POIROT. Think for a moment, Monsieur le Docteur, and your clever brain will give you the answer. Poirot may play the fool, but there is always a reason behind his actions.

DOCTOR. The only reason that occurs to me is, that you don't know exactly who the guilty person is, but that you think that it is one of those here to-night. It was a good bluff to force a confession from one of them.

POIROT (*nodding approval*). A clever idea of yours, but not the truth.

DOCTOR. I don't mean a confession exactly—they might give themselves away in some way. (*Slight pause.*) They might try to silence you as they silenced Ackroyd—*before* you could act *to-morrow morning.* (*Leaning forward across table to each other.*)

POIROT (*with amused surprise*). A trap, with myself as the bait! Merci, mon ami, but I am not sufficiently heroic for that!

DOCTOR. Then I don't understand you. Surely you are running the risk of letting the guilty person escape by putting them on their guard?

POIROT (*shaking his head—gravely*). The guilty person cannot escape—there is only one way out—and it does not lead to freedom.

DOCTOR (*incredulously*). You honestly believe that one of those people here to-night committed the murder?

POIROT. Yes!

DOCTOR. Which one?

(*There is a slight pause*—POIROT *begins to speak in quiet reflective tones, but with emphasis.*)

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Poirot. All the facts point indisputably to *one* person. To begin with, there were two facts and one leetle difference in time which especially attracted my attention. The first fact was the telephone call. If Captain Paton was the murderer the telephone call was without meaning and absurd. Therefore, I said to myself, Ralph Paton is *not* the murderer. I satisfied myself the telephone call was not sent by anyone at Fernly Park; yet I was convinced the criminal was amongst those present on the fatal evening. Therefore I concluded the telephone call must have been sent by an accomplice. I looked for the motive of the call, by judging the *result*. Which was—that the murder was discovered that night, instead of the following morning. You agree to that? Tres bien! Now we come to the second fact. A pulled-out chair in the position shown by Parker from the door. What was on the desk was hidden by the back of the chair. Supposing there had been something on that desk—placed there by the murderer and not intended to be seen, something that the murderer had not been able to take away with him at the time he committed the crime, but something it was vital should be removed as soon as possible *after* the crime had been discovered. And so, the telephone call, and the opportunity for the murderer to be on the spot when the body was found. (*Slight pause.*) Now, four people were on the scene before the police arrived: yourself, Parker, Major Blunt, and Monsieur Raymond. Parker I dismissed at once, because whatever time the crime was discovered, he was the one person certain to be on the spot. Also, it was he who told me about the pulled-out chair. Raymond and Blunt still remain under suspicion. Now, one thing escaped you to-night. Granted the dictaphone was being used by Sir Ackroyd that night, why was no dictaphone found?

Doctor. I never thought of that. (*Looks away.*)

Poirot. So, if something was taken from that desk, why should not that something have been the dictaphone? But there were certain difficulties in the way. The attention of every one was on the murdered man. I think anyone could have gone to the table unnoticed by the other people in the room. But a dictaphone has a certain bulk—it cannot be slipped into the pocket. There must have been a receptacle of some kind large enough to hold it. You see where I am arriving? The figure of the murderer is taking shape?

Doctor. But why remove the dictaphone? What was the point?

Poirot. You take it for granted that what was heard at nine-thirty was Sir Ackroyd's voice speaking into the dictaphone. But consider this useful invention for one minute. You dictate into it—at some later time a secretary or a typist turns it on and the voice speaks again.

Doctor (*with a gasp*). You mean——

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POIROT (*gravely*). Yes! I mean that! At *nine-thirty*, Sir Ackroyd was *already* dead. (*Slight pause.*) It was the dictaphone speaking——

DOCTOR (*quickly*). And the murderer switched it on. Then he must have been in the room at that minute!

POIROT (*sharply*). No! (*With emphasis.*) There had been some mechanical device attached—a time lock—or even a simple alarm clock. The murderer must have been a person Sir Ackroyd knew well, and whom he knew could readjust for him some part of the mechanism—hence the opportunity to take the dagger from the book—a person who had with him a receptacle for hiding the dictaphone. A person who had the study to himself after the crime was discovered, while he sent Parker to telephone for the police. Oh yes, Doctor (*rises*)—it was you.

(*There is dead silence for a minute, and the* DOCTOR *stares straight at* POIROT—*then bursts out laughing.*)

He is a brave man who laughs at the last ditch!

DOCTOR. You're not serious——

POIROT. I am serious.

DOCTOR (*rises*). Then you are mad!

POIROT. I am not mad! (*His whole personality appears completely changed—he presents a man with unswerving purpose and an iron grip of the situation.*)

DOCTOR. You think you can convict a man of murder by theoretical analysis! I could just as easily work out a theory to show that you did it yourself.

POIROT (*speaking in cold authoritative tones—makes every point with masterly effect, as he draws the net of indisputable facts closer and closer round the* DOCTOR). I will prove my analysis. It was the leetle difference in time that first drew my attention to you—at the *very* beginning.

DOCTOR (*puzzled*). Difference in time?

POIROT. Yes, you told me that it took five minutes to walk from the lodge to the house. You left the house at ten minutes to nine, yet you said that you heard a clock strike as you passed the lodge. You killed Sir Ackroyd as you were standing beside his chair—then you went out of the front door and ran round the terrace to the study window. All along I realized we only had your statement for it that this window was fastened. You push open the window, lock the study door on the inside, go out again leaving the window open and run down to the gate. You arrive home shortly after nine, you had timed the dictaphone to speak at half-past nine, and so you had your alibi.

DOCTOR (*assuming a casual tone*). My dear Poirot, what on earth had I to gain by killing Ackroyd?

POIROT. Safety. It was you who blackmailed Mrs. Ferrars.

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Who would know what killed her husband better than the doctor? So you put the screw on too hard, and this poor woman killed herself. If Ackroyd had found you out he would have had no mercy. But you nearly fooled me with that damned telephone call. Only yesterday did I see how it had been done when I learnt that there had been an American steward among your patients who was leaving by the night train for Liverpool and would soon be far away on the sea. I sent him a wireless. This is his answer. "Doctor Sheppard asked me to ring him up. I did so but was cut off." The telephone call was genuine. Your sister saw you answer it—I saw you answer it. But there was only your word as to what was actually said. (*Remains immovable.*) That's all!

Doctor (*during the last lines of* Poirot, *the* Doctor *has seen it is hopeless and that* Poirot *has beaten him, and he gradually collapses and sinks down on to chair and sobs*). But Caryl—Caryl—— My God!

Poirot. The thought of her has tortured me from the very moment I suspected you. *I love her.* Can I go to her and say that you are a murderer, and that it is I who—— You don't know what it costs *me,* Hercule Poirot—— *For her sake* I am going to give you the chance of dying a clean death. You are going to sleep to-night, but you will not wake in the morning. You are a doctor, you know—the way.

(*The* Doctor *stares at him as though fascinated. After a slight pause —the words dropping slowly from his lips.*)

Doctor. I shall—not—wake—in the—morning! (*He is in an agony of fear.*)

(Caryl's *voice is heard calling outside window.*)

Caryl. Monsieur Poirot—James!

Poirot. Your sister! She comes!

Caryl (*off, coming nearer*). Monsieur Poirot—James!

Poirot (*looking steadily at the* Doctor). There must be no mistake.

(Doctor *shakes his head. Rises, pulls himself together.*)

Doctor. There—will—be—no—mistake.

(Caryl *enters.*)

Ah, Caryl my dear! (Doctor *laughs and stoops to knock his pipe, which he has been clutching, on his boot.*)

Caryl (*puts hand on his shoulder*). Ralph and his wife are so depressed; I couldn't get a word out of Ralph; he's gone off to bed like a lost soul. (*To* Poirot.) He says everything's against him.

Poirot. I will see the Chief Constable and that he is cleared of all suspicion.

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CARYL (*surprised and brightly*). Then you have got the murderer! (*Excitedly.*) Who is it?

(POIROT *does not answer—shrugs his shoulders—smiling weakly.*)

(*She turns to the* DOCTOR.) Who is it?

(*The* DOCTOR *and* CARYL *are going towards window* R.)

DOCTOR. Poirot will tell you all about it. I've got a lot of work to do—don't disturb me.

(*He goes to the window. She calls him back. He puts his hands on* CARYL'S *shoulders and kisses her.*)

Good night, Caryl. (*Looks at her. Kisses her again. Smiles.*)

CARYL. Good night! I shan't be long.

(DOCTOR *goes to window.*)

POIROT. Good night, Docteur.

DOCTOR. Good night.

(*He goes out slowly at window, deep in thought,* CARYL *following him to window.*)

POIROT (*softly*). Mees Caryl! (*Coming in front of table to* R. *end of same.*)

CARYL (*comes down a little*). Yes?

POIROT. I do not know what to say—I am ashamed.

CARYL (*laughingly*). Ashamed! Why?

POIROT. Poirot has failed.

CARYL. Failed! (*Comes to him.*)

POIROT (*nodding his head in agreement*). Failed miserably! I am beaten!

CARYL. It can't be possible! (*Looks searchingly at* POIROT.)

POIROT. Anything is possible when a foreigner tries to play the game in England. I am confused by the English character—the murderer has escaped me. (*Gravely.*) He will never be found in this world—in the next . . . who knows! In London they will speak of me as poor old Poirot. But I shall not hear it! I leave for my own country.

CARYL. I *am* so sorry. (*Taking his hand.*)

POIROT. Kind Mees Caryl! (*Looking at her searchingly.*) Then my parting will be a happy one. (*Kisses her hand.*)

CARYL. No, it won't. Good-bye. (*Goes to window.*)

POIROT. Believe me, Mees Caryl, I do everything possible to be of service to you.

CARYL (*comes back to him*). I don't care what anyone says, you will always be—— (*Holds out her hand.*)

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Poirot (*taking both her hands—kisses them*). "Un de ces jours."
Caryl. What do you mean?
Poirot. Perhaps one day.

(Caryl *goes out slowly by the window* R.)

(Poirot *turns back to table, takes rose out of specimen glass which is on table, kisses it, and puts it in his button-hole, looking off towards the garden where* Caryl *has gone out.*)

Curtain.

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PROPERTIES

ACT I

SCENE 1.—Afternoon.

On Stage.—"Tatler" and "Sketch."
Tea-tray with tea-set on table L.
French novel.
Dagger.
Bridge cards and markers.
Matches.
Ash-trays.
Off Stage.—Tray with cocktail-shaker and glasses R.
Doctor's bag, large size, R.
Gong L.
Salver R.
Letter in large blue envelope R.
Salver L.
2 cocktail glasses L.
Local evening paper.
Door bell (not electric), deep tone, far away, R.
In Study, at back.—Inkstand, writing-pad, etc., etc., on writing-desk.
Telephone.
Lamp.

SCENE 2.—Night.

On Stage.—Remove cocktail-tray.
Remove dagger from French novel on mantel, leave novel.
Put stool from below card-table R. to R. of table L., and put arm-chair where stool was.
Draw curtains, except to large window on R.
Shut study doors.
Off Stage.—Tray with whisky.
Siphon and 4 glasses L.
Black bag R.
Notebook (INSPECTOR).
Door bell R.
Notebook (POIROT).
In Study.—Trick dagger, handle only, to screw into plate on coat of body. This unscrews and takes out and changes with real dagger which is on table.
Dagger with blood hidden on table.
Open window.
Half draw curtains.
Glass (behind doors) or board for crash.
Arm-chair in front of R. end of table.
Black velvet to large window R. and study window C.
Gramophone record of voice, or ACKROYD can speak himself.

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ACT II.—Morning.

On Stage.—Take off bridge cards and novels and periodicals.
Clean ash-trays.
Open curtains.
Off Stage.—Foolscap with list of names for INSPECTOR.
Piece of apron for POIROT.

ACT III

SCENE 1.—Afternoon.

On Stage.—Telephone—desk L.
2 papers for POIROT (written on).
Wireless forms.
25 box of cigars (cigars not used).
Tray with coffee-pot and milk.
Sugar—roll and butter—large breakfast cup and napkin—on table C.
"Times" newspaper—table C.
Off Stage.—Cutting from paper L. for BOURNE.
Rose for CARYL R.
Knocker L.
In Conservatory.—Tier of flowers—one begonia is made to take off—flower.
A specimen glass for begonia broken off.

SCENE 2.—Night.

On Stage.—3 coffee cups—3 liqueur glasses for old brandy—bottle of very old brandy.
Rose is in glass R. of table.
Off Stage.—Salver.
Marconigram.
Cutting from paper (for BOURNE)

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DRESS PLOT

CARYL . .	Act I, Scene 1,	Tennis dress and hat.
	Act III, Scene 1,	Morning dress.
	Scene 2,	Evening dress and shawl.
FLORA . .	Act I, Scene 1,	Tennis dress.
		Evening dress.
	Scene 2,	Negligée.
	Act II,	Morning dress.
	Act III, Scene 1,	Morning dress.
	Scene 2,	Evening dress and cloak.
MRS. ACKROYD	Act I, Scene 1,	Morning dress—black.
		Evening dress.
	Acts II and III,	Morning dress repeated.
URSULA . .	Acts I and II,	Maid's dress.
	Act III, Scene 2,	Coat, skirt and hat.
MARGOT . .	Act III,	French peasant maid's dress.
INSPECTOR .		Country Inspector's uniform—cap, tunic belt, and trousers.
PARKER . .		Butler's suit—dress-coat, high vest, dark trousers.
POIROT		All suits to be French in style.

ACT I

SCENE 1.—Afternoon, sunset.
SCENE 2.—Night.

ACT II

Morning.

ACT III

SCENE 1.—Morning.
SCENE 2.—Evening. (Dinner Jackets.)

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LIGHTING PLOT

ACT I

Scene 1.—Afternoon.

To Open.—Float: Straw full, amber full.
Ceiling Batten. Straw full, amber full.
4 1,000-Watt spot lamps—straw full.
Fire alight. 6 flood lamps on backings clear.
On Cue.—Check everywhere very slowly to ¾ up.
Floods go to amber.
Study, amber length on.
Standard out.

Scene.—Night.

To Open.—Float ½ straw, ½ amber.
Batten (ceiling) out.
Study on *all through* with spot on *body.*
4 1,000-watt spot on ¾.
Hall light and length on.
Staircase alight.
Fire not alight.
Brackets and standards on.
On Cue.—Black out, leaving hall light on (artist control this).
Artist switches hall off. Then on again.
* Parker switches the lamp in hall on and off by an ordinary switch.
On Cue.—Up as before.
On Cue.—Black out. Study lights on all through. *Curtain falls* for lapse of time.
Artist switches hall lights on, and at same time.
On Cue.—Switch brings in blue float with 2 amber lamps in it.
On Cue.—Up to opening lighting.
On Cue.—Black out as before.
On Cue.—Up as before.
On Cue.—Black out as before.

ACT II

As opening of Act I, Scene 1. Morning.

ACT III

Scene 1.—Afternoon.

To Open.—Float: Straw full, amber full.
4 1,000-watt spots on.
Ceiling Batten: Straw amber full.
Gallery aris on.
Floods on backings white.
Length at door P.S.

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SCENE 2.—Night.

To Open.—Float, spots and gallery as Scene 1.
Ceiling batten out.
Brackets, hanging lamp.
Desk standard alight.
Floods: deep blue.

FURNITURE PLOT

ACTS I AND II.

Small table below window, with vase of flowers on same.
Cushions in window seat.
Pelmet and curtains to draw at windows R.
Card table R.C.
2 chairs (small) R. and top of card table.
1 arm-chair L. of card table.
Stool below card table.
Round gate-legged table L.C.
2 arm-chairs each side of same.
Settee with no sides. Cushion for same.
Carpet, rugs, etc.
Clock, lamps, etc., on mantelpiece.

In the study up C.
Curtains at window.
Carpet.
Arm-chair (grandfather). Cushion for same.
Writing table (small arm-chair to same). Lamp on same.

Small table on staircase, with vase of flowers, up L. in arch.
Small table in hall up R. in arch. Vase of flowers on same.
Carpet on stairs up L.
Rugs about room.

ACT III.

Jacobean table, 4′ 6″ by 2′ 6″.
3 round backed arm-chairs.
4 small arm-chairs.
Bureau.
Curtains at windows R.
Curtains at conservatory C.
Bookcases about stage.

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